



James Robert "Jim" Hannah

December 26, 1944 - January 14, 2016

James Robert "Jim" Hannah, recently retired Chief Justice of the Arkansas Supreme Court, died on January 14, 2016, at Unity Health White County Medical Center in Searcy, Arkansas. He was born December 26, 1944, in the Naval Hospital in Long Beach, California, where his father was stationed during World War II. He was the son of Frank Alvin Hannah and Virginia Marie (Stine) Hannah.

He is survived by his wife, Pat Johnson Hannah, who was his rock and soul mate; five children, Jayme Hannah of Cabot, Judge Craig Hannah and his wife Mitzi (Paul) of Searcy, Dr. Todd Hannah and his wife Wendy (Johnston) of Bentonville, Judge Mark Pate and his wife Julie (Jones) of Searcy, and Kelli (Pate) and her husband Mike McNeill of Searcy; thirteen grandchildren, Gabby, Adrian, Ethan, Jackson, and Gracen Hannah; Derek Covington (Jessica); Tyler and Mason Parr; Jacob Corpier; Ian McNeill, Emily, Sam, and Will Pate; and one great-grandchild, Bryson Covington. He is survived by his sister Sara Bowen and her husband Early, of Cypress, Texas; his niece Danielle Bowen and his nephew Marcus Bowen. He is also survived by cousins, Linda Rice of Springfield, Missouri; Margaret Moore of Nixa, Missouri; Paul Hannah of Nixa, Missouri; and Peggy McDaniel of Ozark, Missouri.

While his father was in the Navy, Jim lived in California and Miami, Florida. His

family moved back to Ozark, Missouri, where his parents and uncle and aunt, Lawrence and Bonnie Hannah, opened Hannah's Cleaners in 1945. Jim lived in Ozark, Missouri, until 1960 when his family moved to Harrison, Arkansas, where they owned and operated a soft-drink bottling company with Jim's uncle Walter E. Jones and his aunt Mary Francis (Stine) Jones.

The family's move to Harrison in Jim's junior year of high school was at first difficult for him because in Ozark, he was a popular student and had played on the undefeated basketball team. However, he quickly became a Golden Goblin at Harrison High School, and during his two years there, he excelled as a student-athlete, playing on two basketball teams under Hall of Fame Coach Bob Denniston, and playing on the baseball team.

After high school, he attended Drury in Springfield, Missouri, on a basketball scholarship with plans of becoming a teacher and a coach. He transferred to the University of Arkansas at Fayetteville, where he received both law and accounting degrees in 1968. He was admitted to the Bar of Arkansas that same year. Although he had an offer to work in St. Louis with a national accounting firm, he decided to join the private law firm, Lightle, Tedder, Hannah, & Beebe, in Searcy, Arkansas.

Jim Hannah was a tireless worker for the betterment of the Arkansas judicial system. Between 1969 and 1978, he was city attorney for Searcy, Augusta, Bradford, Des Arc, Garner, Kensett, and Rosebud; deputy prosecuting attorney for Woodruff County; city judge for Kensett and Rosebud; and juvenile judge for White County.

Jim particularly loved his time on the bench. In 1978, he was elected Chancery and Probate Judge for the 17th Judicial District, a position he held for the next 22 years. In 2000, he was elected Associate Justice of the Supreme Court of Arkansas, where he served until 2005, when he was

elected Chief Justice. He led the court until his early retirement on September 1, 2015.

In addition to his many judicial responsibilities, he made time to contribute to and lead a variety of committees and organizations, improving our system of justice. While on the bench, he chaired the Arkansas Judicial Council's Judicial Resources Assessment, Legislative, and Retirement committees; served on the Arkansas Supreme Court committees for Access to Justice, Client Security Fund, Technology, Child Support, and District Court Resources Board; and chaired the Drug Court Advisory Committee. Additionally, he served on the board and as president of the Arkansas Judicial Council and as a member of the Arkansas Board of Certified Court Reporter Examiners.

He served and led national committees as well. President Barack Obama appointed Jim to the State Justice Institute Board of Directors, where he served as chairman. Chief Justice John Roberts appointed him to the Committee on Federal-State Jurisdiction of the Judicial Conference of the United States. In 2014, Jim was named chair of the Board of Directors of the National Center for State Courts and president of the Conference of Chief Justices.

Throughout his legal career, Jim was involved on a state and national level as an advocate for judicial independence, civics education, and public outreach to increase awareness of our judicial system. During his tenure as chief justice, the court established Appeals on Wheels, a leader education outreach program for students. Under Jim's leadership, Arkansas became the first state in nation to publish and distribute the official report of its appellate decisions electronically. Jim also worked with the Arkansas Bar Association to institute an annual "State of the Judiciary" address, which he delivered each year at the joint meeting of the bench and bar.

Among his many other accomplishments, he established and implemented the White County Juvenile Court and Juvenile Probation Office; was an instructor at Harding University; was a faculty advisor for the National Judicial College; was appointed by then Governor Dale Bumpers and later Governor David Pryor to the Arkansas Board of Pardons and Paroles, where he served as secretary from 1972-79; was a legislative assistant to Governor Dale Bumpers; was a member of the Court Leadership Symposium and Innovations in Governance at Harvard University; received the Ozark Ambassador Award from the North Arkansas College Foundation; served as a member American Judges Association; was past president, treasurer, and secretary of the White County Bar Association; was a former member of the Searcy Chamber of Commerce; was past chairman of the Board of Advisors of the Wilbur Mills Alcoholism Treatment Center. He has been involved in leadership roles with Searcy's Chamber of Commerce and Kiwanis Club, including coach, co-founder, and chairman of Little League Basketball and Little League Baseball. He was also

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a member of the UAMS Parents Club. He was an active member of his church, serving as a member of the President Presbytery of Arkansas Nominations Committee and a former deacon, elder, trustee, of the Session for the First Presbyterian Church of Searcy.

Jim believed strongly in the separation of powers among the judicial, legislative, and executive branches, and he was quick to challenge any encroachment on the power of the judiciary by the other two branches. His strong moral fiber led him naturally to promote judicial ethics. In his annual address to the bar and new lawyers, Jim never failed to underscore the critical importance of access to our civil courts for all Arkansans regardless of their ability to pay. Moreover, he understood the importance of judicial independence and advocated for an impartial and unbiased judiciary as the cornerstone of the judicial system.

Funeral Services will be held at 2:30 p.m. Tuesday, January 19, 2016, at First Presbyterian Church, Searcy, Arkansas. Burial will follow at Velvet Ridge Cemetery, Velvet Ridge, Arkansas. Visitation is Monday, January 18, from 6-8 p.m. also at the First Presbyterian Church, Searcy, Arkansas. In lieu of flowers, memorials may be made to the First Presbyterian Church, 400 West Arch Avenue, Searcy, Arkansas, or Chief Justice Jim Hannah Memorial Scholarship Fund, Gift Services, 1 University of Arkansas Fayetteville, Arkansas, 72701.

The family would like to express appreciation to doctors and staff of Vanderbilt University Medical Center; Dr. Arnaoutakis and staff of Winthrop Rockefeller Cancer Institute; and the doctors and staff of Summit Hospice and Unity Health White County Medical Center staff.

Arrangements by Powell Funeral Home of Searcy. www.powellfuneralhome.net

Previous

Tribute Wall

DG

“ To the Family of Arkansas Supreme Justice, Chief Justice James Hannah, we express our condolences to each of you. My memory of Jim # 22 resides within the 1959-1960 Ozark Basket Ball Team of which 13 of us with Coach Lyle Middleton were recognized as one of the top high school basket ball teams in Missouri. Several of our members have passed before Jim and I can appreciate and imagine that great BB reunion and team comradery in the heavens above. Team mates surviving express their thoughts and prayers. Sincerely, John Cobb, Marvin Parsons, Larry Mathis, Dean Meadows, Dwight Cox, Robert White, Doug Goddard, Trainer, Tom Crain, and Coach Lyle Middleton. Rest well, Ozark Tiger until we meet again.

Doug Goddard - May 04, 2016 at 03:10 PM

DR

“ Pat

I can still remember our days in law school with Jim. He was an extremely bright and conscientious student with a wonderful sense of humor. He turned out to be a great judge respected by all. Over the years I had the pleasure of visiting with him over coffee. He was very proud of his family and was devoted to you. We will all miss a good man.

Don Rebsamen

Don Rebsamen - February 10, 2016 at 01:12 PM

RM

“ Jim and I were law school classmates and entered the practice of law about the same time. His innovative role in the legal profession will be missed and he will be missed as a friend.

Retired Judge Andre McNeil - February 10, 2016 at 01:12 PM

JB

“ Jim was a breath of fresh air when he arrived in Harrison in the 10th grade. He was smart, athletic and good looking. His sister was my brothers age and his family went to the Presbyterian Church with my family, We always shared old times whenever I saw him at bar association meetings. I will miss him. He was a very kind and dear person.

Jan Baker - February 10, 2016 at 01:12 PM

CC

“ Jim was an extraordinary advocate for justice and an extraordinary man. I enjoyed all my associations with him at CCJ/COSCA and in a variety of judicial settings. I will miss him terribly. Pat, my thoughts and prayers are with you and your family.
Connie Clark

Connie Clark - February 10, 2016 at 01:12 PM

JC

“ Leave a condolence or a memory.

Janice Collins - February 10, 2016 at 01:12 PM

DD

“ We are so sorry for your loss. The entire State of Arkansas has lost a great jurist. When visiting my brother Paul in Little Rock I had many an occasion to visit with the Chief. It was always such a pleasant experience and always sprinkled with some humor. I know Paul will also miss him greatly as he so enjoyed the Chief's company. Paul was honored to be asked to speak at the service.

David & Leslie Danielson - February 10, 2016 at 01:12 PM

JC

“ To the family of such a great man, Pat I am so sorry for your loss. I don't have to tell you what a great man he was. You've known that for years now. I am sorry for your loss.
To Kelly (whom we lovingly called smelly Kelly) I know he meant a lot to you and gave you guidance. Always remember what road he put you on and stay there.
To Mark look at the road you may have taken and then look at where he took you and where you are today because of him.
Always remember the love and support he gave to you.
To The Judges children. He was there with guidance for you all your lives you were taught by one of the best. Cherish all those memories, they live on with you. Pray to the Lord for strength to help you through this. My prayers are with you all. He and his smile will be missed as no one can quite fill the chair the way he has.

Janice Collins - February 10, 2016 at 01:12 PM

BH

“ I have been before Judge Hannah when I was younger going through a divorce. He was so fair and kind and will greatly be missed. He served this community with great honor and dignity. Craig I know the pain of losing a father I too lost mine back in 2011! He was my world and my best friend. My thoughts and prays goes out to you and your family he will be greatly missed and will be greatly accepted in heaven! God bless you and your family during this time of sorrow.

Bobby Harris - February 10, 2016 at 01:12 PM

DB

“ Pat What a gentle man you loved and we can only imagine the hole in your heart. As Regina and I reacted with tears to the news I could only think of one thing - "He is Risen!" We Presbyterians celebrate and witness resurrection but we still miss them with all our hearts. We send our Love Dennis and Regina

Dr Dennis & Regina Bennett - February 10, 2016 at 01:12 PM

MA

“ I just learned to Jim's death. To Sarah Beth - my childhood best friend, I'm so sorry. you are in my thoughts today.
Mary (Farthing) Adams

Mary Farthing Adams - February 10, 2016 at 01:12 PM



“ My sympathy goes out to the family during your time of grief. May God's loving-kindness comfort you and help you through this difficult time. (Psalm 119:50,76)

January 19, 2016 at 12:00 AM