

Former Mississippi Supreme Court Justice William Joel Blass died Oct. 23

October 23, 2012

Former Mississippi Supreme Court Justice William Joel Blass of Pass Christian died Tuesday, Oct. 23, four days after his 95th birthday.

Funeral services will be held at 11 a.m. Saturday, Oct. 27, at St. Thomas Catholic Church in Long Beach. Visitation is 5 to 8 p.m. Friday, Oct. 26, at St. Thomas Catholic Church.

Mississippi Supreme Court Chief Justice Bill Waller Jr. of Jackson said, “He was a great legal scholar and outstanding leader of the bar for many years. He lived professionalism by example and was an inspiration to attorneys and judges.”

Court of Appeals Judge Virginia Carlton of Columbia served as a law clerk to Justice Blass starting in 1989. “He took his duties very seriously. He greatly impressed upon us that every case is import and affects lives,” she said. “He impressed upon us the duties that go with the public office, and the importance of integrity in the judiciary and adherence to the law. He loved the law. He was a great mentor.”

Chancery Judge Jim Persons of Gulfport said Justice Blass touched all parts of the legal profession – lawyer, law professor, legal scholar and judge. He represented Stone County in the Mississippi Legislature for seven years. He was much admired by the bench and bar “for his civility, integrity, honesty and forthrightness and his legal ability and intellect,” Judge Persons said. “He had a brilliant mind. He was a good man and a good lawyer.”

Former Mississippi Bar President Leonard “Len” Blackwell II of Biloxi said, “He was very progressive and was one of my heroes and inspired me to go on and study law....He was a leader in racial reconciliation” in the 1950s. “He was a real stalwart and an example of what a lawyer ought to be,” Blackwell said. “He was a real progressive and believed in the rule of law.”

Former Gov. Ray Mabus appointed Blass to a vacancy on the Mississippi Supreme Court in 1989. He served through December 1990. He was defeated in his election bid by Justice Chuck McRae.

Blass was born in Clinton, Mississippi, on Oct. 19, 1917. Both of his parents were teachers, and his father was a Baptist minister, so the family moved numerous times. Blass attended East Mississippi Junior College and Pearl River Junior College. He earned his A.B. and LL.B. degrees from Louisiana State University.

He was admitted to the Louisiana Bar in 1940, and to the Mississippi Bar in 1947. He served as a Special Agent of the Louisiana Crime Commission under the office of the Louisiana Attorney General 1940-1941. He served in the U.S. Army 1941-1946, including combat duty in Europe during World War II. He was awarded the Bronze Star for action in Germany. He also served for a year on active duty during the Korean conflict.

He practiced law in Wiggins 1946-1965. He served in the Mississippi House of Representatives 1953-1960. In 1965, he became a professor of law and director of research at the University of Mississippi School of Law. He went on to serve as associate dean. He

joined the law firm of Mize, Thompson and Blass in Gulfport in 1971, and remained in private practice until his appointment to the Supreme Court. He returned to teaching at the University of Mississippi in 1991, where he held the Whitten Chair of Law and Government. He practiced law with the firm of Mize, Blass, Lenoir and Laird in Gulfport 1991 to 1994, then was of counsel with Gerald Blessey and Associates in Biloxi.

He was named Outstanding Teacher at University of Mississippi School of Law in 1969. He served as a member of the Mississippi Board of Bar Admissions 1979 -1985, and as a commissioner of the National Conference of Commissioners of Uniform State Laws 1981-1988. He was a Fellow of the American College of Trial Lawyers, the Young Lawyers Division of the Mississippi Bar, and the Mississippi Bar Foundation. He received the Mississippi Bar Foundation Professionalism Award in 1999, and the Mississippi Bar Lifetime Achievement Award in 2000. He was listed in *Best Lawyers in America*.

He was a Knight of St. Gregory, and served two years as president of the Diocesan Pastoral Council of the of the Diocese of Natchez-Jackson.

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