

2009

CORETTA SCOTT KING

Women For Diversity Award Winner



*Judge
Jeannine Turgeon*

by Mikell Worley

We have a Renaissance woman in our midst! Judge Jeannine Turgeon's list of accomplishments, causes, interests, and talents would give pause to Leonardo Da Vinci. Judge Jeannine Turgeon, known to many as "JT," serves as a trial judge in Dauphin County. She is married to Chip Milspaw and has three daughters and two stepdaughters. Currently the judge is chairing a subcommittee examining the establishment of a family court, rewriting the instructions for the Pennsylvania Civil Jury, chairing a Pennsylvania Sentencing Commission subcommittee to create statewide re-sentencing guidelines,

Judge Jeannine Turgeon

and teaching at Widener Law School at the Harrisburg campus. A dedicated community volunteer who serves on committees, boards, and task forces on local, state, and national levels, JT is known for her compassion for families and children at risk.

Along with her professional endeavors, JT recently finished a book project on *Bellevue Park's First 100 Years*. For fun the judge enjoys scuba diving, underwater-photography, sky diving, hang gliding, reading, and spending time with friends and family. She frequently donates her photographs to fund raising auctions for community organizations.

The judge has been a strong supporter of *Women-CONNECT* since its first issue. "This magazine is wonderful because its articles encourage women to excel above their expectations. My reach has frequently exceeded my grasp. This magazine and its publishers and writers are committed to helping women shine in the darkest places when it seems impossible to move forward. Women need to always remember, when in a difficult situation, we need to be understanding, supportive, and compassionate, not competitive and difficult. Women need to support each other in this world more than we do. This magazine supports that philosophy."

JT maintains that, "it is very important to maintain friendships. One friend is more valuable to your quality of life than 50 acquaintances. I work very hard at coordinating get-togethers with my college girlfriends, law school girlfriends, and my best friend from high school here in Harrisburg. If you don't have this opportunity, or have lost contact, then join a women's book club with women who are interested in expanding their horizons and willing to share fellowship."

Life is full and busy for JT. "Having two stepdaughters and three daughters, numerous Rotary exchange students, plus friends, and neighborhood kids, managing a law firm, and now serving as a judge keeps life interesting," remarks the judge. "I am very fortunate to have a loving husband and a good support system. I always made time for regular dates and one vacation a year without children to nourish our marriage. In hindsight, this was very important. We are still very much in love and still enjoy being in each other's company as well as our children's, more than anything else in the world."

JT attributes her interest in the community to lessons learned in her formative years. "I'm a child of the Kennedy generation. We were taught to be responsible, get involved, and make the world a better place. I see a parallel era in our country today with President Barack Obama's leadership.

"I've been a 'community organizer' for as long as I can remember," notes JT. "In high school I organized a clean-up of the Paxtang Parkway behind Kline Village. The fish vendor at the Kline Village Farmer's Market gave everyone who helped a fish sandwich. When I was 16 my Sunday school class held Sunday evening dances in 'The Attic' (our church basement). Kendall Link and his wife, Reverend Jody Link, encouraged me to organize an activity for kids in a drug and alcohol free environment. It was safe place for us teens to do something we loved to do – dance!"

Her interest in safe places continues today. Harrisburg's Mayor Stephen Reed appointed JT as a delegate to the Presidents' Summit held in Philadelphia in 1997. At the time she was a juvenile court judge attempting innovative approaches to reduce teen criminal activity. At the summit, Colin Powell organized a long term commitment to the children of America with America's Promise Alliance, www.americaspromise.org. All five living presidents attended, and they along with delegations from across the nation made a commitment to the children in their communities based on the premise of five tools for life, or "Five Promises." They are (1) A Caring Adult, (2) A Healthy Start, (3) Education, (4) Safe Places, and (5) Opportunities to Volunteer.

JT returned to our community and began implementing the promises locally. She served as vice president of the Tri-County Alliance for Youth for six years and is currently the chair of the Safe Places Promise for America's Promise of Greater Harrisburg.

We can also credit JT for introducing to our area the "Do the Write Thing Challenge" www.dtw.org, which gives middle school students an opportunity to examine the impact of violence on their lives. Through classroom discussions and writings, students communicate their personal experiences and their suggestions on reducing violence in our community.

In spite of economic concerns Judge Jeannine Turgeon is very hopeful about our future. "Adversity builds character. Our recent election shows people are feeling more empowered. More people are willing to get involved in their community. We can all find a way to do our part."

Optimism and an appreciation for the value of others are some of Jeannine's greatest strengths. "Each woman reading this is beautiful, classy, and strong, who can contribute to her community in her own way. The important thing is to live life to the fullest, while helping others, as well as taking care of yourself." She practices what she preaches. Through her job, her volunteer activities, and the pursuit of a variety of hobbies and interests, Judge Jeannine Turgeon exemplifies a value-driven life well lived. ❖