



AJA MEMBER PROFILE

Judge Harold V. Froehlich
Circuit Court, Outagamie County
Appleton, Wisconsin

Judge Harold Froehlich worked at a number of jobs before joining the Wisconsin bench in 1981, starting with a paper route when he was 12 years old. He also worked in a mill and a bakery and served in the U.S. Navy, where he had plenty of time to think and read. He decided on a career in law in the mid-1950s, but becoming a judge was not his immediate goal.

"I saw law as a fair way for getting into politics," he said. After graduating from the University of Wisconsin Law School, he started in private practice in 1962, joined the state assembly as a Republican in 1963, and was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives in 1973. It was in Congress that he faced a particularly tough test as a member of the House Judiciary Committee: the impeachment of President Richard Nixon.

"Depressing, quite frankly," he said about this period in his life. At the 1972 Republican National Convention, he had been a member of the Wisconsin delegation, which was pledged to support President Nixon's reelection. Even so, he said, "I made my own judgments."

Each member of the Judiciary Committee was entitled to a five-minute statement when the day came to vote on the articles of impeachment. Rep. Froehlich stayed up until 2:00 am the night before figuring out what to say. He voted for two of the articles. He left Congress in 1975 and served as a Ford delegate at the 1976 Republican Convention.

It isn't too surprising that he found his way to the bench. He spent many hours in the Wisconsin General Assembly working to help the judiciary; for example, to increase judicial salaries and staffing. He was recognized for his work in modernizing the state's judiciary with the Wisconsin State Bar

Association's "Judge of the Year Award" in 1999.

Wisconsin circuit judges take on a wide variety of cases. "We do everything in this county, from misdemeanors to felonies," Judge Froehlich said. "We like it that way—the variety."

His cases have certainly run the gamut. He presided over the first "three-strikes" case (a sexual assault) in 1996. One of his most interesting cases started two and a half years ago and is still going strong: the *Hudson* murder case, which involves a stabbing and a pursuit worthy of an episode of "World's Scariest Police Chases" through an "intersection I go through all the time," he said. This "messy case" has dragged on thanks to the intransigence of the defendant, who has gone through five lawyers and has been forced to watch the trial on closed-circuit television because of his emotional outbursts.

Then there's the recurring case of a local homeless man, who files suit against his father or brother every six months. At least he's well behaved and punctual, despite having "fried his brains with drugs. He always appeared when he was supposed to appear," Judge Froehlich said. One day, he showed up with some plastic cups and a bottle of booze and poured himself a drink in the middle of court. He offered one to Judge Froehlich, who declined: "I don't drink from plastic cups." This story made the local paper the next day: "Judge Refuses to Drink from Plastic Cup."

Judge Froehlich has been AJA's treasurer since 1999, a job which he took because he felt he was "too old" for the officers' chairs but still wanted to participate in the running of the organization. "It's a comfortable position," he said, "and you don't have to run for it." But he's willing to give it up. Any takers? 