

Michael A. Petrolle

The Honorable Michael A. Petrolle (Retired)

Michael A. Petrolle, a New Jersey Superior Court Judge, retired after twenty-seven years of service and now engaged as counsel to The Toscano Law Firm, LLC, with offices in Caldwell, has practiced the profession of law in the state of New Jersey, whether as an attorney or as a judge, for fifty-six years ever since his admission to the New Jersey bar a few weeks after his graduation from Seton Hall University School of Law in 1967. Married to his beloved Beatrice, the director of Repechage – Beauty from the Sea – manufacturing operations, Judge Petrolle is proud, loving father of his cherished Laura, mother of his treasured grandchildren, Camilla and Barrett, and a professor of psychology at Arizona State University, and his precious Audra, mother of his adored granddaughter, Fiona, and an attorney with Rose Law Group with offices in Scottsdale, in Arizona - both daughters of his dear, deceased wife Elizabeth. For forty years, he has made his home in Essex Fells, New Jersey, where his daughters were raised and schooled until they attended secondary school at Montclair Kimberly Academy, and Laura went off to Yale University, and Audra went off to New York University.

Presiding over criminal, civil and juvenile proceedings affecting the lives of thousands upon thousands of people and their families across and beyond the state of New Jersey, the judge has conducted hundreds of jury trials to verdict. Recognized in 2017 by the Essex County Bar Association with its Lifetime Achievement Award and in 2001 by the Peter W. Rodino, Jr. Law Society of Seton Hall Law School with its Distinguished Service Award, he has worked with numerous premiere prosecutors and famous defense attorneys as well as top law enforcement officers. Indeed, the innumerable men and women whom he has engaged as law clerks or mentored as judicial interns have themselves achieved outstanding careers in the law. He has often taught courses in continuing legal education and given educational talks to various groups of judiciary administrative personnel.

Born in 1942, in Newark, Judge Petrolle has been confronted with severe visual impairment from birth. He was blessed, however, with bright, loving and able parents who proved dauntless in seeking out and securing the finest in medical treatment and care (including several surgeries) for their son – even in the 1940's when so many great surgeons and physicians were overseas in military service during the Second World War. The judge's late father, Anthony Petrolle, a merchandising executive with R. H. Macy & Co. (formerly L. Bamberger & Co.), and his late mother, Columbia Bibbo Petrolle, a licensed funeral director and owner/manager of the former Bibbo Funeral Home, in Newark, were equally relentless in expecting and requiring, with warm affection, the best in effort and performance from each of their children – whether at home, at church, at school, at work or at play. They instructed and insisted that Michael treat the visual condition as an incentive rather than an impediment for working and excelling.

Raised “Down Neck” in Newark's Ironbound Section within easy view of the Essex County Courthouse, Michael lived with his parents, his younger sister Jacqueline Lynne (Ms. John J. Cannon) and extended family in an apartment above the family funeral business on Ferry Street. At home, in the heart of an all American neighborhood bursting with rich, exciting and varied ethnicities, but awash with Italian culture expressed in different dialects every couple of streets, Michael was imbued with high values and great goals his family shared with their friends and neighbors. While he received formal elementary training through public education in the Newark school system – initially in braille, and eventually in sight conservation, classes at Newton Street and Wilson Avenue Schools – as well as religious education at Our Lady of Mount Carmel R. C. Parish Church and School, the hospital, the playground, the street and the neighborhood as well as the funeral home taught him early and prescient lessons in human relations the judge has found increasingly valuable for appreciating diversity, enhancing sensitivity, enriching personal, social and professional interaction, and quickly understanding others' problems.

After completing his Newark schooling in 1956, Michael received his college preparatory education at Suffield Academy, a boarding school in then rural Connecticut. His initiation into the prep school life of mild tastes, muted tones, nonsectarian chapel services, understatement and reserve proved a startling contrast to his inner-city childhood in Newark's homes and streets teeming with exhilarating and demonstrative people of diverse cultural, ethnic, racial and religious identities. Although he developed familiarity, comfort and facility with the intriguing

lifestyle of preparatory school, once there for a short stint, Michael came to admire as genuine and exquisite the sounds, flavors, aromas, sights and views he had treated as commonplace during his childhood in the city. His ever increasing appreciation of the prize of his own Italian-American heritage has inspired the judge to join other Italian-American culture enthusiasts in arranging and hosting visits by government, police and bar representatives from Italy to participate in Columbus Day events over the last twenty-five years.

After his graduation from Suffield Academy in 1960, Michael took his undergraduate education at the University of Pennsylvania, in Philadelphia, where in 1964 he received an A.B. in English, and then took his graduate legal education at Seton Hall University where in 1967 he received a J.D. Once graduated from law school, he undertook service for one year, 1967 to 1968, as a judicial law clerk to Essex County District Court (now New Jersey Superior Court Special Civil Part) late Judges Sam A. Colaruso, Raymond Del Tufo, Jr., John A. Marzulli, F. Michael Caruso, Howard W. Hayes and David Wiener. In 1968, he began a career as a lawyer – first in private practice in a law firm he sounded with a law school classmate. While trying simultaneously to build a law firm and to secure his family's funeral business, Michael took his mortuary science education at American Academy McAllister Institute, in New York City, and received his New Jersey Funeral Director's License in 1970.

In 1970, he received an appointment as an Assistant Essex County Prosecutor from the late Joseph P. Lordi, then County Prosecutor of Essex County, for whom he served part time while he continued in the private practice of law as well. Eventually, in order to comply with a change in the law making the position of assistant county prosecutor full time, he gave up the private practice of law, in 1971, and practiced exclusively in the service of the Essex County Prosecutor. He investigated and tried to verdict scores of cases ranging from assault, weapons, narcotics and sex crimes, beyond complex fraud and white-collar crime, to homicide and organized crime.

Attracted by broadening professional and business opportunities, he resigned from his position as assistant prosecutor in order to resume the private practice of law which he continued until his appointment as Judge of the Superior Court in 1995. Spanning three decades before his appointment and culminating in the law firm of McCormack, Petrolle & Matthews, his private practice involved conduct of criminal and civil litigation including jury trials to verdict, and real estate and business transactions, from initial client interview to final disposition, as well as counsel and representation of publicly held corporate entities. In the course of his professional career, he also served as public sector labor counsel to various urban municipalities and as member and longtime president of the New Jersey State Board of Mortuary Science.

Ever grateful for the good fortune assuaging his own visual condition and empathetic with other people experiencing visual impairment, Michael assisted as a member of the Board of Trustees of Electronic Information and Education Systems ("EIES") of New Jersey in transmitting, over a sub-carrier of the Seton Hall radio station, newspaper, magazine and other reading services as well as talk shows to the blind, visually impaired and other folks confined to their residences.