



Rufus King III

“Open to all. Trusted by all. Justice for all.” That’s the motto of D.C. Superior Court. But when Rufus King III took over as chief judge eight years ago, the court was having trouble living up to those words.

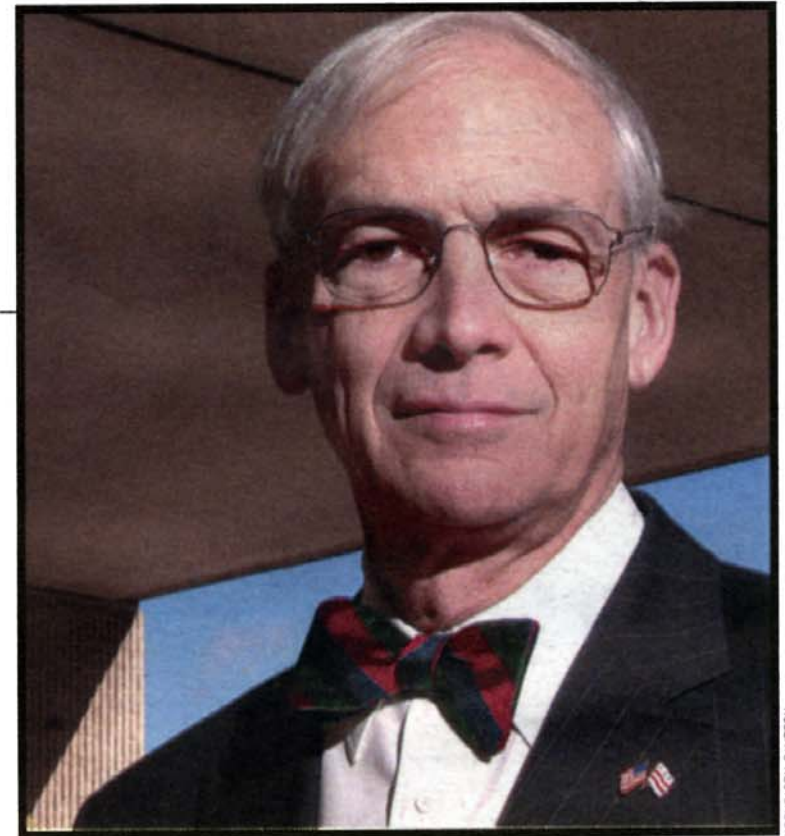
Court-appointed lawyers weren’t getting paid, courthouse staff didn’t receive promised raises, and the court’s relationship with its congressional overseers was shattered. Not to mention, the courthouse—one of the busiest in the country—was in dire need of a technological overhaul.

In short order, the soft-spoken King turned it all around, leading the court through a major evolution that included placing standards on lawyers looking to take on court-appointed cases, creating community court programs, and establishing a Family Court.

“He is a very fine representative of the Superior Court on the Hill,” says Superior Court Judge Joan Zeldon. “I think his humility and dignity speak well for us.”

One of King’s first initiatives was to consolidate the court’s 19 separate databases into one. Now, a judge or clerk can see if a person has cases in the Criminal Division, Landlord and Tenant Branch, or Family Court with a single search.

The overhaul of the court’s Family Division, which had been the source of intense congressional scrutiny after a child was killed after being returned to her mother in 2000, was just as tricky. At one point, Congress even threatened separating the division from the Superior



Court, an outcome King avoided. The result: A Family Court within Superior Court that has 30 judges to staff cases.

King also keeps people happy by being available. On Mondays between 8 and 9 a.m. anyone with a comment, question, or complaint can go to King’s office and tell him about it directly.

King announced this month that he will take senior status when his second 4-year term runs out in September. —ATTILA BERRY