

Rick Courtney Receives 2009 Theresa Award

Jackson attorney Rick Courtney has received the 2009 Theresa Award for his work in special needs advocacy. The honor is defined as “an annual community service award presented by the Theresa Alessandra Russo Foundation to a National Association of Elder Law Attorneys (NAELA) member in recognition of his/her advocacy and support of individuals with disabilities. Through the efforts of the selected NAELA member, individuals with disabilities are able to achieve a better quality of life, protect their rights and preserve their dignity. The award was established in memory of Theresa Alessandra Russo, the daughter of NAELA Past President Vincent and Susan Russo. The Theresa Foundation also contributes a cash grant of \$2,500 to an organization named by the recipient of the award, that assists and supports children with disabilities.” Mr. Courtney has selected The Mustard Seed as the recipient of this grant for 2009.

The article below is written in The Theresa Foundation newsletter announcing this year’s honoree.

Richard A. Courtney. 2009 Theresa Award Honoree. My Dad.

As an attorney who has devoted his law practice to helping the elderly and children with special needs, Richard A. Courtney is an excellent choice for the 2009 NAELA honoree for the Theresa Award. He has devoted his life’s energy to serving and inspiring those of us around him to leave everything we touch somehow better than we found it. My name is Melissa Courtney McCleese, and I am his daughter.

Rick Courtney is a Certified Elder Law Attorney in Jackson, Mississippi. His legal career began in 1978 when he joined his father’s general civil law practice. In 1985, he and his law partner, Mike Frascogna, formed the law firm of Frascogna Courtney, PLLC, and remain partners today.

Dad was destined to be a good attorney because he is, quite simply, a good man. His love for God translates to a love for people and a desire to help enhance their lives. His professional life began to focus on enhancing the lives of the elderly and children with special needs in 1979, after my twin sister, Melanie, and I were born and it was discovered that Melanie had cerebral palsy. Dad initially found Medicaid, public benefits and special needs programs to be difficult to find and navigate. Once he solved these puzzles and arranged for appropriate services for Melanie, he realized that his experience could benefit other families who were affected by disabilities of all types. He then noticed that many of the issues confronting young people with disabilities were similar to those affecting the elderly and he began working with older clients from his community. A practice concentrating in special needs and elder law was born. But that’s not the whole story.

After college, Dad married his high school sweetheart, Ruthie, who worked to support them through law school. Dad is also very proud of his 29-year-old daughters, Melanie and me. Melanie was mainstreamed in middle school and graduated from a community college with a degree in Paralegal Studies. She now works at my parents’ church. I went to Mississippi College and graduated with a degree in communications. I am now the law firm’s Public Relations Director and mother of Rick’s two grandsons.

The Courtney family are dog lovers and after three generations of Maltese dogs as the family pets, they moved on to Golden Retrievers. Dad has a certified therapy dog named “Gus,” a 90-pound Golden Retriever, and in 2007 Melanie received a skilled service dog named “Madine,” a black Lab from Canine Companions for Independence. Gus goes many places with Dad . . . to the office, to nursing homes, even to a local library for “Paws and Puzzles”, a program that allows children who have autism to interact with therapy dogs.

Between serving on the NAELA Board of Directors, teaching Elder Law as an Adjunct Professor at Mississippi College School of Law, serving on the boards (and as President) of the Cerebral Palsy Foundation, Hospice Ministries of Mississippi and the Mississippi State Bar Trusts & Estates Section, Dad is a wealth of information and an inspiration to many. He has shared many profound things with me throughout my life, but one seems to stand out more than others. “Strive to be significant, not just successful.” The wonderful thing is that I know exactly what he means by that because I have seen him live that statement out for the last 29 years, both in his personal and professional life.

The Theresa Foundation is proud to have Richard Courtney as its 2009 NAELA Honoree.