“The Hon. Michael D. Ryan passed away on Monday, January 30, 2012. He was 66. His friends, family, and colleagues are shocked and saddened by his sudden passing. Justice Ryan retired from the Arizona Supreme Court in August of 2010, after serving as a Judge in Arizona for more than 24 years. A lifelong community servant, his passing has left a huge loss for everyone who knew and loved him and for Arizonans who depended on him as a patient, careful and thoughtful jurist. Family and friends will remember Mike as a loving, kind, and thoughtful man. He found the love of his life early on and loved her until the day he died. Karen was his partner in life and his best friend, and together they raised three sons.”

Education & Military

He earned his BA from Saint John's University, in Minnesota in 1967. From 1967 to 1969, he was in the USMC, in battle, in Vietnam. He was an infantry platoon commander, achieved the rank of first lieutenant and was wounded in combat. As a result of his battle wounds, he received a medical retirement in February 1969. He was awarded two Purple Hearts, and won a Bronze Star, with a Combat “V” for heroism in combat. He started law school in 1974 and graduated in 1977, with his JD from the Sandra Day O'Connor College of Law.

---


2 St. John's University is a private Catholic university in New York City. Founded and run by the Congregation of the Mission in 1870, the school was originally located in the neighborhood of Bedford–Stuyvesant in the borough of Brooklyn. In the 1950s, the school was relocated to its current site at Utopia Parkway in Hillcrest, Queens. St. John’s also has campuses in Staten Island and Manhattan in New York City and overseas in Rome, Italy. In addition, the university has a Long Island Graduate Center in Hauppauge, along with academic locations in Paris, France, and Limerick, Ireland. The university is named after Saint John the Baptist. St. John’s University is a private Catholic university in New York City. Founded and run by the Congregation of the Mission in 1870, the school was originally located in the neighborhood of Bedford–Stuyvesant in the borough of Brooklyn. In the 1950s, the school was relocated to its current site at Utopia Parkway in Hillcrest, Queens. St. John’s also has campuses in Staten Island and Manhattan in New York City and overseas in Rome, Italy. In addition, the university has a Long Island Graduate Center in Hauppauge, along with academic locations in Paris, France, and Limerick, Ireland. The university is named after Saint John the Baptist. https://www.stjohns.edu/

3 The Purple Heart is a United States military decoration awarded in the name of the President to those wounded or killed while serving, on or after April 5, 1917, with the U.S. military. With its forerunner, the Badge of Military Merit, which took the form of a heart made of purple cloth, the Purple Heart is the oldest military award still given to U.S. military members – the only earlier award being the obsolete Fidelity Medallion. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Purple_Heart

4 The Bronze Star Medal is a United States decoration awarded to members of the United States Armed Forces for either heroic achievement, heroic service, meritorious achievement, or meritorious service in a combat zone. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bronze_Star_Medal

He became a prosecutor in the Maricopa County Attorney's Office, serving in the Major Felony Bureau and as co-coordinator of the county’s sex crimes unit from October 1977 to October 1985. He became a full-time judge pro tempore for the Maricopa County Superior Court until June 1986, when Governor Bruce Babbitt appointed him to a seat in the Maricopa County Superior Court. He served there from 1986 until 1996. He was the associate criminal presiding judge until 1996, when Governor Fife Symington appointed him to the Arizona Court of Appeals. He presided over many big cases and noteworthy events including the criminal trial of former Governor Evan Mecham. Ryan was appointed on September 11, 1996 to the Arizona Court of Appeals by Governor Fife Symington III. Six years later, in May 2002, Governor Jane Hull appointed him to the Arizona Supreme Court.

Mike supervised another ASU Law graduate while he was at the Maricopa County Attorney’s Office, a fellow marine named Rick Romley. Rick would become the elected Maricopa county attorney, but at the time was under Mike Ryan’s supervision. Romley recalled his boss as “very quiet, soft-spoken, and a bit of a prankster.”

While Ryan was with the county prosecutor’s office, he and his wife, Karen, had three children. They also became foster parents to high-risk infants. “Mike just loved it, he’d just come in the door after work and sling a baby over his shoulder right away . . . together the Ryans fostered eighty babies over the years before they were placed for adoption or returned to their birth parents.”

Honors, Awards & Salutations

This following list is likely incomplete, knowing that Mike Ryan was never one to bring attention to himself. He was a judge’s judge. He spent twenty-four years on the bench. He was exactly the kind of judge that Justice Thurgood Marshall was talking about when he famously said, “We must never forget that the only real source of power that we as judges can tap is the respect of the people.” How his colleagues, fellow judges, and litigants respected him is evident by this list:

- 2005 State Bar of Arizona’s James A. Walsh Outstanding Jurist Award
- 2003 Arizona State University College of Law’s Outstanding Alumnus Award
- 2003 Arizona State University College of Law's Distinguished Achievement Award
- 2001 Semper Fi award, Phoenix Chapter, First Marine Division Association
- 2001 Judicial Award of Excellence for outstanding dedication and commitment to improving the justice system, State Bar of Arizona, Public Lawyers Section
- 2001 Honorable Henry S. Stevens Judge of the Year Award for outstanding service to improve the legal system, legal profession and professionalism of the bench and bar, Maricopa County Bar Association
- 1999-2000 Board of Directors’ Member of the Year, Maricopa County Bar Association

---

6 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Evan_Mecham
7 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Michael_D._Ryan
8 Id at page 12.
9 Id at page 12.
This short bio of Mike Ryan began with his obituary. It seems fitting to end it by referring to the eloquent piece written by Maureen Kane (class of 1994), in the July/August edition of the Arizona Attorney Magazine. For her and hundreds more, Mike was friend, mentor and hero. Her piece began with the fact that when Mike died, his burial was in Washington, DC at Arlington National Cemetery, with full military honors, “four horsemen at the march, followed by a riderless steed, with the sounds of red-jacketed Drum and Bugle Corps musicians, the Commandant’s Own band leading the procession.” She wrote about the caisson bearing the flag-draped casket, and about a ceremony befitting a hero—“Once a Marine, Always a Marine.” “On command,” she said, “seven marines presented arms and fired their rifles three times. Silence followed. Off in the distance, a lone bugler sounded Taps, a plaintive farewell tribute.”

Ms. Kane told the story she heard from Mike’s best friend, Jeff Woodburn (Class of 1977) at ASU Law. Even though Mike Ryan was a brilliant student, when it came time to get the bar exam results, he couldn’t get out of bed because he was so worried he’d flunked the bar. “He did pass,” she said, “and he and Woodburn celebrated way too hard.”

11 www.azbar.org
12 Id at page 10.
13 Ibid.
14 Id at page 11.