

# Howe leaves seat on bench today but will not stray far from the law

*Mother of two looks forward to spending time with grandchild, continuing work on revising Calif. attorney grievance process*

**BY EARL KELLY**

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After working in the law since she was 10 years old, Judge Barbara Kerr Howe hangs up her robes today as an active member of the Baltimore County Circuit Court bench.

But friends say that although Howe, who turned 62 on Christmas Day, may be retiring, they can't imagine her not working.

"I don't think there's ever been a week in this woman's life when she worked only 40 hours; 60 hours would be more like it," said long-time friend and former University of Maryland law school classmate Judge John F. Fader II. "This is a retirement from the bench, but she isn't stopping."

Howe's work has paid off, and her legal career has been a success by any standard.

The first woman to serve on the Baltimore County Circuit Court, Howe has been on that bench since 1988, where she served as administrative judge from 1992 to 1996. She served as a district court judge from 1985 to 1988, and was a Harford County zoning hearing examiner from 1975 to 1985.

Howe was president of the Maryland State Bar



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**Baltimore County Circuit Judge Barbara Kerr Howe, who officially retires today, cautions lawyers and judges to make sure they have lives outside the courtroom.**

Association in 1996-1997 and served several terms on that association's executive committee and board of governors.

Getting an early start helped pack a lot into life, Howe said of her career.

"I began college when I was 15 and had a bachelor's degree when I was 19. I learned to type at age

# Howe

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10 and was typing deeds for my [attorney] father at ten and a half."

In typical fashion, Howe earned a double (English and French) college major.

Fader's observation on Howe's work ethic rings true, and starting next month Howe has scheduled four trips to California, where she serves on the American Bar Association's Standing Committee to revise that state's attorney grievance procedures.

"It's extremely tiring and very emotional, but extremely fulfilling work," Howe said.

While also active in designing professional disciplinary standards in Maryland, Howe understands the pressures of running a small law practice.

She was in general practice with her father, Nelson Reed Kerr and brother, Nelson Reed Kerr Jr., from the time she was admitted to the bar in 1969 until appointed a district court judge in 1985, and they faced the usual problem of slow- and non-paying clients.

"I did all the bookkeeping for our firm, and one of the happiest days in my life was when I didn't have to do that anymore," said Howe. "I'll never forget how my father used to say, 'We're not running an eleemosynary institution here,' and I

would say, 'Yes, we are.'"

Family Division Master C. Theresa Beck, immediate past president of the Baltimore County Bar Association, started her own legal career as an associate attorney in Kerr, Kerr & Howe.

Beck was a law clerk for now-retired Baltimore County Circuit Judge Walter Hale and had an opportunity to observe attorneys in court. She knew immediately she wanted to work with Howe.

"She is phenomenally bright, but she doesn't come on as conceited; she's not stuck on herself," Beck said. "She has always been committed to high quality, and she has been a great inspiration to a lot of us."

When asked what advice she had for other attorneys and judges, Howe said: "Make sure you have a life outside the courtroom. You can get emotionally buried, and you have to protect yourself against that."

Always an avid traveler — "Paris is my favorite city in the world," she said — Howe plans to spend part of her retirement studying cooking in France.

But most of all she wants to spend more time with her family, especially the newest member, granddaughter, Louise Martindale Baron.

"I've done a lot of stuff," Howe said, "but the most important thing I did was have two children. That's how I feel about my life."