

Jervis S. Finney, former U.S. attorney for Maryland, dies



Jervis S. Finney is a member of the Maryland State Squash Hall of Fame. (No Source)



By **Frederick N. Rasmussen**
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Jervis S. Finney, a former U.S. attorney for Maryland and legal counsel to former Gov. Robert L. Ehrlich Jr. who also served in the state Senate and was a Baltimore County councilman, died Sunday at his home in the Charlesbrook neighborhood of Baltimore County of congestive heart failure. He was 85.

"Jervie was a central figure in my life, and both he and his family have been interlaced in my success," Mr. Ehrlich said. "He was one of the best lawyers in the country and a dominant figure in Maryland politics for 50 years. He was beloved."

"Jervie touched the lives of so many people," said U.S. District Judge Richard D. Bennett, who noted that Mr. Finney had hired him as an assistant U.S. attorney. "He was a tenacious trial lawyer, but always a gentleman. We've lost a good one."

"Jervis Finney had a distinguished private and public career. I think his time in the Maryland Senate was his greatest love," said former state Sen. Julian L. "Jack" Lapidus. "Even though he was a Republican, there was never the friction that there is today. ... He held no malice toward the Democrats."

Jervis Spencer Finney was born into a prominent Maryland family. Born in Baltimore and raised in Stevenson, he was the son of Dr. George G. Finney, a surgeon, and Josephine Lurman Stewart Finney, a volunteer, gardener and horsewoman. His maternal grandfather, Redmond C. Stewart, was a lawyer who served in the state legislature in 1902.

Mr. Finney attended Gilman School and graduated in 1949 from Phillips Academy in Andover, Mass. His political career began when he worked in 1952 for Ohio Sen. Robert A. Taft prior to and during that year's Republican National Convention.

After graduating cum laude from Princeton University in 1953, he served as a paratrooper with the 11th Airborne Division.

He graduated in 1958 from Harvard University School of Law and joined the firm of Ober, Kaler, Grimes & Shriver, which merged last year with Baker Donelson.

In 1962, he was elected to the Baltimore County Council from the 2nd District, which included Pikesville and Randallstown. He swept into office on a ticket headed by Spiro T. Agnew, who was elected county executive.

Four years later, Mr. Finney was elected to the state Senate, and after serving two terms ran unsuccessfully for Baltimore County executive against Theodore G. Venetoulis in 1974. He lost by 7,000 votes.

"He was a very good friend and a really good guy," said former Gov. Harry R. Hughes who served in the General Assembly with Mr. Finney. "He was a great legislator and one of my better friends in the legislature. When he gave you his word, you could count on it."

Mr. Finney was named U.S. attorney for Maryland in 1975 by President Gerald R. Ford. He succeeded George Beall, who had prosecuted then-Vice President Agnew in 1973.

"The sweeping federal investigation into political corruption will not suffer one little bit if Jervis S. Finney is appointed United States attorney for Maryland," Mr. Beall, who died earlier this year, told The Evening Sun at the time.

His term as U.S. attorney was dominated by the political corruption trial of former Gov. Marvin Mandel. In a 2003 article, The Baltimore Sun recalled that Mr. Finney "burnished his reputation as squeaky clean and ethically pure, a label he carries to this day."

After the convictions of Mr. Mandel and several other public officials, Mr. Finney stepped down as U.S. attorney in 1978 and rejoined his law firm in Baltimore.

From 1979 to 1983, he served on the Maryland State Ethics Commission, and in 1998 served as special independent counsel to the Joint Legislative Ethics Committee regarding allegations against state Sen. Larry Young, who in 1998 became the first member of the General Assembly in two centuries to be expelled for ethics violations.

In 2003, Mr. Finney again left his law firm to serve as Mr. Ehrlich's lawyer. He called Mr. Ehrlich 30 days before he was elected governor.

"I was in my car when he called and said, 'Look, I'll leave my law practice for you and become your counsel,'" Mr. Ehrlich said.

The two had known each other for years. Mr. Finney's brother Reddy had been headmaster of Gilman when Mr. Ehrlich attended the school, and when the future governor got out of law school, Mr. Finney "became my first boss at Ober, Kaler, Grimes & Shriver," he recalled.

"He advised me when I was in the House of Delegates and the House of Representatives," said Mr. Ehrlich, who called Mr. Finney his attorney and "chief protector."

With his tailored dark Brooks Brothers suits, horned-rimmed glasses and fine manners, Mr. Finney exuded an aristocratic air and was a confident attorney and public servant.

"He's a rough inside player," Mr. Venetoulis told The Sun during Mr. Finney's time on the governor's staff. "If Ehrlich needs some steel, Finney will give it to him. And he won't leave any footprints."

In 2003, Mr. Ehrlich named Mr. Mandel to the University System of Maryland Board of Regents. It was years after Mr. Mandel's convictions had been overturned, and the appointment brought the former prosecutor and defendant into the same political orbit.

"Bygones be bygones," Mr. Finney told the Sun.

Said Mr. Mandel: "I've never had any unpleasant history with Finney."

"It was one of the most amazing things I've ever seen. Jervie knew I was close to Mandel and there was some lingering animosity between them, but I knew they both cared about my success and they got along," Mr. Ehrlich said. "I asked them to work together for the good of the state."

Mr. Finney returned to Ober, Kaler, Grimes & Shriver in 2007 as counsel. He retired in 2016.

"Jervie was with us for 50 years," said John A. Wolf, a longtime friend and a principal of the firm.

"In the courtroom, he was sharp as a tack and very fine-tuned," Mr. Wolf said. "He very carefully chose his words. I know it's so hackneyed to say he's a lawyer's lawyer but he was — and really lived it."

"He had a great sense of humor and spoke with his face," recalled Mr. Bennett. "He'd give you a look over those glasses, and it was an enormous force."

In a statement, U.S. Attorney for Maryland Rod J. Rosenstein said Mr. Finney was "renowned for his commitment to legal ethics." He said the Maryland U.S. attorney's office will name its sixth-floor conference room in Mr. Finney's honor.

A squash player who played into his 80s, Mr. Finney was inducted into the Maryland State Squash Hall of Fame in 2005 and was a U.S. and Canadian champion.

He was a member of the Maryland Club and the Green Spring Valley Hunt Club. He was also a sailor and enjoyed spending summers in Nova Scotia at Little Fish Island, which his family has owned since 1908.

He had been a longtime member of Brown Memorial Woodbrook Presbyterian Church. Plans for services are incomplete.

Mr. Finney is survived by his wife of 42 years, the former Patricia Jane Voneiff; two sons, Jervis Spencer Finney Jr. of St. Louis and John E. "Jack" Finney of Roland Park; a brother, Redmond C.S. Finney of Butler; and four granddaughters.

NOTE: An earlier version of this story incorrectly stated the location of Mr. Finney's home. It has been corrected [here](#).

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