

# COURTS



## Bell Barely Avoided Record In High School Trip Through the Courts

*Laake Tells Tale of Chief Judge  
Being 'Sit-In' Participant in '60s*

**C**ourt of Appeals Chief Judge **Robert M. Bell** got his first exposure to the state's high court more than three decades ago — and narrowly avoided earning a criminal record.

In his monthly missive to members, **Prince George's County Bar Association** President **Walter E. Laake Jr.** reveals that in the early 1960s, Bell — then student body president at Baltimore's Dunbar Senior High School — was part of a group arrested and convicted for trespassing at a Baltimore restaurant.

Bell and the others were protesting the owner's "No Negroes" policy at Hooper's Restaurant, and refused to leave until they were served. The owner swore out warrants for the "sit-in" participants, and each was found guilty and fined \$10.



**BELL: EARLY ACTIVIST**

The Court of Appeals upheld the convictions, but the U.S. Supreme Court ordered the state court to reconsider. In the meantime, Maryland abolished the trespassing law and Baltimore City enacted an ordinance prohibiting public accommodations, including restaurants, from refusing service based on customer's race.

In addition, the federal government enacted the **Federal Civil Rights Act** of 1964.

Initially the Court of Appeals affirmed its earlier decision, ruling that the effect of the Civil Rights Act was purely prospective. But on reconsideration the court reversed itself — and Bell's conviction.

Participants in the case make up a kind of "Who's Who" on today's Court of Appeals.

Besides Bell, current Court of Appeals Judge **Lawrence F. Rodowsky** first argued the appeal as an assistant attorney general, and Bell's predecessor as chief judge, **Robert C. Murphy** — then deputy attorney general — argued it the second time around.

*Jane Bowling*