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Samuel Alito Is First U.S. Supreme Court Justice to Visit Domus

by Craig D. Robins, Esq.

For the first time in the history of the Nassau County Bar Association, a sitting Justice of the United States Supreme Court visited the home of the Association. On September 28, 2006, Associate Justice Samuel A. Alito, Jr. appeared as the keynote speaker and special honoree at the annual dinner of the Theodore Roosevelt Chapter of the American Inns of Court. The event was very well attended with approximately 200 guests including many judges from the federal, state and local branches, and numerous other dignitaries. Justice Alito, who is the newest appointment to the Supreme Court, flew in from Washington just for the occasion.

As Justice Alito entered the reception, some attorneys seemed to morph into paparazzi, anxious to photograph the justice, while a number of the guests, especially judges, seemed to become just as anxious to be included with Justice

Alito in the various photographs. Justice Alito was especially good natured about this and pleasantly cooperated with the various photo requests as the guests had a rare opportunity to meet, talk and mingle with him.

The highlight of the evening was a half-hour speech in which the Justice detailed the time period that began when he was notified of his nomination, to the end of his first term. He called this his "travelogue of the past year." In his address, the Justice mostly delivered amusing and light-hearted anecdotes which seemed to easily captivate the audience. All guests, whether Republican or Democrat, readily agreed that Justice Alito was a master story-teller and a charming speaker with a keen, yet soft-spoken sense of humor. The Justice received rather long, well-deserved, standing ovations both before and after his presentation.

The Justice said that being nominated by President Bush was an incredible shock and that the confirmation process was an incredible transformation which resulted in him being plunked into the world of Washington politics.

In one amusing anecdote, the Justice commented that as soon as he was nominated, he seemed besieged by the press who sought to photograph and film him during every waking moment, hoping to catch him tripping or saying something embarrassing. He mentioned that for a while, he was photographed on a daily basis in one particular building in Washington where he was frequently on one of the upper floors. He explained that there was a very large open atrium in the center of the building, which all hallways opened out towards. The Justice further explained that as he left a room, the photographers waiting outside would immediately get in front of him and

walk backwards, photographing the Justice as he proceeded down the hall.

The Justice said that he developed images in his mind of the mass of photographers backing up to the banister and falling over the railing, like lemmings, several stories to their death, at the bottom of the atrium. As the photographers got increasingly close to falling over, the Justice said that he actually felt alarmed for them, which showed in his facial expressions. Finally the Justice explained that the resultant published pictures of him showed his fearful expression, but belied his true concern for the photographers' fates, not his reaction to the confirmation proceedings.

In another anecdote, the Justice discussed his new duties and responsibilities as the "Junior" Associate Justice. One of them included being the "official door opener." Justice Alito explained that when all of the Justices meet privately in conference, one of them has to get up to answer when someone knocks on the door. He said he quickly mastered this duty and told the audience how easily the words now come, "who is it; what do you want?"

He also related his experience with the confirmation hearings to that of his sister who recently traveled to Mongolia. In Mongolia, while riding camels, his sister was chased by rabid dogs. He said that he felt the same way as he felt chased and criticized by the press during the time leading up to his confirmation hearings.

The dinner, which was hosted by Nassau County bankruptcy attorney Craig D. Robins, as the master of ceremonies, had several other Inn of Court presentations. Nassau County Supreme Court Judge Ira B. Warshawsky, the out-going

president, delivered some opening remarks about the importance of civility and collegiality in the practice of law. Brookville attorney and former president, Marilyn K. Genoa, delivered the invocation. President of the Nassau County Bar Association, Douglas G. Good, offered the toast to Domus.

Inn Secretary, Douglas T. Burns, detailed Justice Alito's lengthy and impressive background and provided his introduction. Also in attendance as a special guest was Douglas T. Burn's father, Arnold I. Burns, who worked with and mentored Justice Alito when Arnold I. Burns was the Deputy Attorney General of the United States under the Reagan Administration. It was the efforts of the Burns that resulted in the Justice's participation.

Justice Alito swore-in the Theodore Roosevelt Inn's new 2006-2007 board, officers and president. Incoming-president, Lois Carter Schlissel, delivered an address about the future of the chapter. Ms. Schlissel is the managing attorney of Meyer, Suozzi, English & Klien. Also sworn in was the new president-elect, Judge Leonard B. Austin. On behalf of the Inn, Craig D. Robins presented Justice Alito with an engraved Waterford Crystal Clock. He also presented Judge Warshawsky with a gift for his service as president. The Inn customarily makes a donation each year to a local law school and this year the recipient was Touro Law School.

The Theodore Roosevelt Inn of Court is a chapter of the American Inns of Court, which is dedicated to the enhancement of civility, ethics and legal excellence in the practice of law. To foster these concepts, the chapter emphasizes hands-on participation in the preparation and presentation

of programs which address every-day experiences which lawyers face in their practices. Members include a number of federal and state judges, from seasoned trial lawyers to inexperienced litigators, attorneys from both public and private sectors, and law students from Touro, Hofstra and St. John's Law Schools.

The Chapter holds monthly dinner programs which are usually held at the Nassau County Bar Association and follow an agenda that typically begins with a buffet dinner. At the dinner, not only do the members interact socially but the more experienced attorneys and judges mentor younger lawyers and law students. Dinner is followed by the monthly program and is often concluded by a lively discussion where members pose questions and discuss their diverse views and perspectives. The Theodore Roosevelt Inn of Court has received authorization to grant its members C.L.E. credit for attending the programs.

Editor's Note (revised 2008): Craig D. Robins, Esq., a frequent contributor, is a Long Island bankruptcy lawyer who has represented thousands of consumer and business clients in Chapter 7, Chapter 11 and Chapter 13 bankruptcy cases during the past twenty years. He has offices in Medford, Commack, Woodbury and Valley Stream. He can be contacted at CraigR@CraigRobinsLaw.com and (516) 496-0800. Please visit his bankruptcy law firm Websites: BankruptcyCanHelp.com and CraigRobinsLaw.com.