

Obituary: Timothy Pawol, a quiet champion for people in need

Jan. 20, 1950 - May 25, 2020

May 31, 2020 8:25 PM

By Janice Crompton / Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

Timothy Pawol gave a voice to those who needed it the most.

As a longtime assistant solicitor for Allegheny County, he sued unscrupulous landlords on behalf of seniors and single parents, and was unflinching in his defense of children, fearlessly criticizing policies and procedures in the county's Children and Youth Services Department.

Later in his career, Mr. Pawol advocated for those with special needs, and created a first-of-its-kind, non-profit trust that combined and sheltered assets of disabled people, while preserving their eligibility for special services.

Mr. Pawol, 70, died Monday at his Scott home after a battle with central nervous system lymphoma.

His friend and colleague didn't choose his life's work based on the accolades, said Edward Picchiarini, CEO of Arc Human Services and The Arc of Washington County.

"Tim affected the lives of countless people who don't even know his name," said Mr. Picchiarini, who worked alongside Mr. Pawol in the local human services sector for more than 25 years. "He always did everything like that, with no fanfare. He never stood up in the room and made big speeches or tried to get his name out there. He was a humble man."

A native Ellwood City, in Lawrence County, Mr. Pawol graduated from Geneva College with a bachelor's degree in history in 1971, followed by a law degree from Duquesne University School of Law four years later.

Mr. Pawol devoted his career to the public interest, first as a solicitor for the county Department of Health in 1976.

He had an instant impact in that role, representing low-income renters who were being driven from their home by landlords illegally shutting off utilities.

Mr. Pawol made inroads with the negligent landlords by having each summons delivered by hand, which garnered a much faster — and more effective — response than registered mail.

Gaining a reputation as a man who brooked no nonsense, Mr. Pawol was trusted with other sensitive jobs, including as assistant county solicitor, managing a unit of lawyers who mainly represented the CYS department.

Mr. Pawol worked several high-profile cases and was appointed in 1996 to serve as interim director of CYS and to report on its efficiency.

In news reports at the time, county officials said they placed Mr. Pawol at the head of the perennially troubled agency because he “couldn’t be duped,” and because he never tried to mislead them or minimize problems at the agency.

His findings were troubling.

“We are consistently inconsistent,” Mr. Pawol said in the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette in February 1996, on the heels of his 15-page report detailing various deficiencies at the agency that he said jeopardized the safety of children.

“He usually kept his work at the office, but it was a pretty intense time,” recalled Terri Pawol, his wife of 46 years. “He had a kind heart — he cared about people and justice and doing the right thing.”

When the closing of Western Center was announced in 1998, Mr. Pawol secured an agreement with the state that allowed those on waiting lists to be moved to group homes along with the residents of the former institution in Cecil, Washington County.

“For every person who came out of Western Center, one person from the waiting list would also be moved to a group home,” Mr. Picchiarini said. “Tim advocated very strongly for that, all the way to the state.”

Mr. Pawol’s decisions might have been unpopular at times, Mr. Picchiarini said, but his motives were never questioned.

“The bottom line was always whether this would help a child or a person with disabilities,” he said. “For him, that was the only measure and he would always persevere.”

Mr. Pawol continued to serve as deputy director of CYS until he left the county in 1998 to accept a post as president and executive director of The Family Trust, the first pooled trust for people with special needs in Pennsylvania.

“Tim worked on guardianship and eligibility issues for people,” Mr. Picchiarini said. “In order to get services in the system, people have to be eligible moneywise. Tim helped people put any money they had into a trust so they could maintain their eligibility and they could have money to use themselves.”

Mr. Pawol went on to become a trust administrator for Life Enrichment Trust, Inc. and served as in-house counsel for AAdvantage, Inc., the parent company of The Arc of Washington County and Arc Human Services.

An avid outdoorsman, Mr. Pawol also was passionate about shooting sports and served on the national board of the National Rifle Association.

“He refereed for NRA shooting competitions,” his wife said. “The big one was always the national police competition.”

A “walking encyclopedia” of knowledge, her husband was the ideal trivia companion, Mrs. Pawol said, and beloved for his sense of humor.

“He was extremely witty,” she said. “Even when he was in the hospital and brain tumors were taking their toll, he would always be cracking up the nurses with his witty remarks.”

Along with his wife, Mr. Pawol is survived by his daughters Beth Pawol, of Mt. Lebanon, and Hilary Snider, of Collier; and his sister Judy Pasta, of Enon Valley. He was preceded in death by his siblings Joe Pawol Jr. and Sally Rudolph.

The funeral is private due to health restrictions.

In lieu of flowers, memorial contributions can be made to: Gallagher Foundation, 1370 Washington Pike, Suite 401B, Bridgeville, PA 15017 or to The Arc of Washington County, 470 Johnson Road, Suite 200, Washington, PA 15301.

Janice Crompton: jcrompton@post-gazette.com.