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## Judge Gerald W. Heaney: Friend, Colleague, and Community Leader

Gene W. Halverson\*

I first met Judge Gerald W. Heaney in the summer of 1947. He was a partner in the three-man Duluth law firm of Lewis Hammer & Heaney, and about a year and a half out of wartime service with the United States Army Rangers. I was in the last quarter of my law school education which had been interrupted for three and one-half years by my own military service during the Second World War. I was looking for a way to support my wife and infant son. Gerry and his two Republican partners were looking for a trial lawyer.

Gerry and I hit it off immediately. It wasn't hard for the son of a butcher from Goodhue, Minnesota and the son of a southwestern Minnesota farmer to find common ground from whatever class consciousness such upbringings might produce. Throw in a common interest in Democratic Farmer Labor politics and it was a union made in heaven, and not just because Gerry needed any help in being the dominant political force in the firm before my arrival.

Gerry was a leading figure in northeastern Minnesota in setting the course of Eighth Congressional District DFL politics in line with the rest of the state during the 1948 general election. Henry Wallace was a candidate for the presidency as leader of the Progressive Party. A number of political activists in the Eighth District continued to regard the Soviet Union as a worthy partner in world politics. The Cold War was in its infancy. The phrase "Iron Curtain" had only recently been coined by Winston Churchill. Gerry's efforts combined effectively with those of Hubert Humphrey, Orville Freeman, and others to mold northeastern Minnesota into a bastion of support for Humphrey, Freeman, Eugene McCarthy, and Fritz Mondale in the years to come. Their impact was in large part possible be-

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cause of their solid political support in northeastern Minnesota.

Being a point man was nothing new for Gerry. I spent a week as a guest of Gerry and his wife, Eleanor, in September 1947, sleeping in their den while I looked for housing for my family. On a shelf next to where I slept was an assortment of medals and citations for military valor earned during Gerry's service with the United States Ranger battalion, which was the first to hit the Normandy beaches in June 1944. Gerry had been turned down by his draft board for medical reasons. He went next door, as it were, as an Army volunteer and was accepted. The rest is history, as Gerry's Ranger battalion fought across France and Germany into Czechoslovakia with stops along the way at such scenic wonders as the Battle of the Bulge. When the war in Europe ended, Gerry was one of only three of the original 600 who were still with the battalion.

While not every battlefield hero found it easy to make the transition to civilian life, Gerry hit civilian life like the Rangers hit the beaches—running. He threw himself into representing organized labor during the troubled period of the late forties and fifties. He acted as legislative liaison with the Minnesota legislature for Governor Freeman. He helped Hubert Humphrey in his campaigns for the United States Senate and in his race for nomination as Democratic candidate for president. He served as Democratic National Committeeman and as a Regent of the University of Minnesota.

When the fortunes of politics turned against him, he turned his remarkable energies to organizing businesses to overcome the loss of the steel mill and other businesses in Duluth. He put together a coalition of businessmen to purchase Northern Drug Company, a wholesaler on the verge of liquidation, thereby saving the business and the jobs that went with it for another thirty years. He gathered a different coterie of investors to start WDIO-TV, an ABC affiliate. Had President Johnson not appointed him to the United States Court of Appeals thirty years ago, he undoubtedly would have continued his one man crusade for industrial development in Duluth. All the while there was never any person whose cause was too small or too unpopular to receive his sympathetic professional attention.

Once on the bench, his political activities were greatly reduced, but, if rumor is correct, not entirely curtailed. He served as a mentor for a group of Duluth-area women who

formed a nonprofit corporation called Townview Improvement which acquired dilapidated housing in the center of Duluth, restored it with loans from local banks and government agencies, and put it back into the hands of private entrepreneurs.

Gerry accomplished all of this without becoming afflicted with any of the pomposity that sometimes goes with being a judge. He remains as common as an old shoe. He continues his commitment to those less favored in life, to the poor, the underrepresented, the working men and women. He has remained faithful to his principles for thirty years as a judge. As far as I can tell, he's still the same person I met in 1947. That's good enough for me.

