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### **Richard G. Siegel : Distinguished Achievement in Public Service**

St. Norbert College

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# 2015 Distinguished Achievement in Public Service



## Richard G. Siegel '72

“A civilizing, insistent human voice that made a difference to those in need of help.”

Thus did his nominator describe Rich Siegel, a man who has spent more than 40 years in the dogged and compassionate pursuit of justice.

Rich chose a path most others would find daunting, serving in the probation office of the Cook County Juvenile Court in Chicago. There, he worked day in and day out with young men and women facing life-changing crises, most often from dysfunctional families and broken communities, lacking even the most basic support system. Guided by an abiding sense of fair play, Rich insisted on due process for his clients,

and earned the respect of those he worked with at every level of the criminal-justice and social-service communities.

Also, mid-way through his career at juvenile court, Rich began working as a part-time crisis worker at a local YMCA. He would be at this position for 20 years. He was on call in the evening to respond to runaway situations, where the police had taken a teenager into protective custody. Rich would often need to meet with the police, parent and minor to develop a plan on the spot. This could include a return home, placement in a foster home, and follow up counseling. In this position, Rich was part of a team that provided much needed services for runaways in the south suburban area of Chicago.

Retiring from the probation office after thirty years, Rich was only beginning his service to others. For the next eight years, he would work as a juvenile court liaison for the Montefiore Special School, well-known to him from his probation-office days.

Montefiore is the Chicago Public School System’s city-wide facility for behaviorally disordered and emotionally disturbed boys. The work was difficult: Montefiore boys would often find themselves in the juvenile court and its detention center. One of his colleagues at Montefiore notes that Rich represented boys at the court perhaps 3-4 days a week, securing critical services like anger management, family counseling, drug treatment and more. Outside of court, Rich assisted the school’s guidance department in calming and mentoring families in crisis. During most of his years with Montefiore, Rich also served as a Chicago substitute teacher.

In 2009, when the school faced funding and staffing cuts. Six juvenile-court justices took the unprecedented step of writing a letter lauding the work of the school and of Rich Siegel in particular.

Most recently, Rich has been working with the public defender’s office in a new program, through which he advocates for clients seeking fair and reasonable bonds in criminal cases. One of Rich’s colleagues confirmed that many of Rich’s clients who would otherwise be sitting in jail pending trial have been able to return to their jobs and their families.

One of Rich’s lifelong friends suggests the spark for such a full life of service. He notes that the two attended a Jesuit preparatory school together, where they were taught the joys of service and inspired to heed the words of Pope John XXIII:

“Today, more than ever, we are called to serve mankind ... to defend above all and everywhere, the rights of the human person.”

The same friend says that later, at St. Norbert, Rich received further confirmation that “a different world could not be built by indifferent people.”

Rich lives with his wife and two children in the Chicago area.

Far from indifferent, Rich has approached the problems of the world with deep compassion, conviction and commitment. He is a worthy recipient of the college’s Distinguished Achievement Award.

## St. Norbert College

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