

UPPER BROOKVILLE

HE SET THE BAR

Village justice retiring after three decades of imparting wisdom, passing on life lessons

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John Pieper, Upper Brookville's retiring village justice, figures he's presided over 10,000-plus cases over three decades in the role.

The lion's share were triggered by tickets for speeding, blown stop signs and unlawful tree removals.

Many of the infractions involve motorists who use Northern Boulevard to cut through Upper Brookville, a long-running frustration for residents of the village — population, 2,000. Criminal cases don't come before him. But with oversight of the village's court system, Pieper is among a handful of Long Island jurists with outside influence on his community's rules and regulations. For decades, he has been an arbiter of suburban disputes, both big and small.

Most of the time, he says, the disagreements are small. In one case, he recalled, a resident's spotlight was bothering a neighbor. So Pieper pushed for a resolution and asked the homeowner if he could use a less intrusive light. The homeowner agreed.

"It's not a big job," he admitted, modestly. "Nothing major."

Now Pieper, of Upper Brookville, who is almost 82, is stepping down from that role — a position he's held across five mayoral administrations without pay, Upper Brookville Mayor Elliot Conway said. Pieper has served as a steady hand and an invaluable resource, Conway said.

"He's empathetic; he cares about people, and I think he's just fair-minded," Conway said in an interview. "He dispenses justice from the bench like a father . . . he's not beyond passing on life lessons."

Served in military

Pieper graduated from St. John's Law School in 1970. He was wearing his military uniform under his graduation robes at the ceremony — he recently had been sworn into the U.S. Army. While taking the bar



From left: Jack Pieper (grandson), Mayor Elliot Conway, Village Justice John Pieper, Karin Pieper (wife), Damian Pieper (son), Troy Pieper (son) and Liam Pieper (grandson) attend the ceremony commending the jurist for his years of service to Upper Brookville.

Adjourned

■ John Pieper, a longtime Upper Brookville village justice, is retiring from his role after more than 30 years adjudicating cases.

■ Pieper presided over 10,000-plus cases in the village.

■ He taught students to pass the state bar exam for roughly half a century.

exam, he phoned his wife, Karin, during a break, he recalled. She told him he had received a telegram from the U.S. Pentagon calling him to Georgia for officer training. He was later transferred to Baltimore, Maryland, where he began teaching law at Fort Holabird, a now-closed U.S. Army installation. He then received a post-graduate law degree from New York University, and Pieper re-

tired from the Army as a captain, he said.

In 1975, he began teaching a bar exam prep course. He taught the class for five decades, passing the bar himself 32 times in states across the country to stay on top of the test's latest changes. He rode a motorcycle to take many of those exams, despite one of his former professors furiously scolding him for having one, he recalled. He never told his students he rode motorcycles.

Pieper started as an associate justice in the village 32 years ago and was elected village justice in 2001, according to Pieper and records from the State Comptroller's Office.

'A good listener'

In tackling those cases, Pieper said he aimed to "treat everyone with respect."

Conway said Pieper is "a

good listener," both inside and outside of the courtroom and "has his ear to the pulse of the village," making him an invaluable sounding board for the mayor who was first elected in 2016 by a one-vote margin.

The village on the North Shore of Nassau County, where crime rates are among the lowest in the region, is among the most affluent on Long Island. Upper Brookville's median household income is more than \$250,000, according to 2023 U.S. Census data.

The village court system is a modest revenue generator for state and local governments. Upper Brookville's court generated \$36,713 in 2023, according to data from the State Comptroller's Office.

Over the course of his legal career, Pieper ran 25 marathons and raised three children: Troy, Damian and Kristina, all of

whom are lawyers, he said.

As he exits his role, Pieper said he and his wife are now focusing on their five grandchildren.

His son, Troy Pieper, will succeed him as village justice this spring after the village board appointed him to the position.

"I think if I could just continue what he did, I would have made a difference for a little longer," the younger Pieper said in an interview.

He said he saw firsthand how his father "commanded respect" from plaintiffs, defendants and lawyers through his calm disposition.

Growing up, Troy said his dad's diligence in work was reflected with the effort he put into his family. He would "get to the office at 5 a.m. so he could be at our school to catch our sports and do all sorts of things with us," Troy Pieper said.