



THE JOSEPH F. WEIS JR. / CHESTER WERNECKE BOBBLEHEAD

CELEBRATING THE 100TH ANNIVERSARY OF
JUDGE WEIS'S BIRTH

William M. Janssen

Judge Joseph F. Weis served on the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Third Circuit from 1973 until his death in 2014, and on the U.S. District Court for the Western District of Pennsylvania from 1970 to 1973. In March 2023, his law clerks celebrated the 100th anniversary of his birth. During the proceedings, they each received what may be the most elaborate judicial bobblehead ever made. We were quite impressed when we heard about this from Nancy Rapoport, a longtime friend of and contributor to the *Green Bag*. The primary moving force behind the Judge Weis bobblehead, Professor Bill Janssen, has provided us with photographs and the explanation below.

— *The Editors*

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JUDGE WEISS APPEARS IN HIS JUDICIAL ROBE, holding a copy of the *Report of the Federal Courts Study Committee*, as he presented it to Chief Justice Rehnquist on April 2, 1990.¹ He is standing on a dictionary, showing the disfavored word “flout” and preferred word “flaunt,” in tribute to the Judge’s joust with *New York Times* columnist William Safire.² Nearby is a Christmas Tree and Menorah, recalling the Judge’s dissent in the Pittsburgh Establishment Clause case of *ACLU v. County of Allegheny*.³ (The U.S. Supreme Court’s later five-opinion decision on certiorari review spans a massive 107 pages!) An old-style railroad crossing sign conjures the familiar “Stop, Look, Listen” caution the Judge invoked by analogy in *Gaiardo v. Ethyl Corp.*,⁴ as a reminder of the prefiling duties Fed. R. Civ. P. 11 imposes on counsel (“Stop, Think, Investigate, Research”).

In his left hand, the Judge holds his tennis racket, reminiscent of a favored pastime and of his often-repeated advice to his law clerks to stay always active, healthy, and well-rounded. To the front right is the Devitt Award, given to the Judge upon his selection by his fellow federal judges for distinguished service to justice.⁵

Chester Wernecke appears in his dress uniform honoring his distinguished service in the United States Army. Mr. Wernecke’s extraordinary heroism on the WWII battlefield outside the town of Nancy, France on November 11, 1944 began a lifelong friendship with the then critically injured, fellow soldier (the future Judge Weis) whose life he saved that day. The base is topped with the map of the Allied assault on Nancy that ultimately led to the events of November 1944. The base front presents the Judge’s and Mr. Wernecke’s names. The base right-side displays the Pittsburgh federal courthouse and the U.S. Public Law that named it in the Judge’s honor. The base left-side notes the 100th birthday celebration Symposium. The base’s underside contains your bobblehead’s limited-edition number.

¹ To watch that presentation, go here: www.c-span.org/video/?11961-1/presentation-final-report-chief-justice.

² To read Safire’s article, go here: www.nytimes.com/1981/09/13/magazine/on-language.html.

³ 842 F.2d 655, 663 (3d Cir. 1988).

⁴ 835 F.2d 479, 482 (3d Cir. 1987).

⁵ To watch the award ceremony, go here: www.c-span.org/video/?40544-1/ceremony-honoring-judge-joseph-weis.

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