

Lost Giants

by Fred Neil, Dover City Council

In a span of three days, home owners on leased land lost two Giants who protected us in different ways. Neither Jim McGiffin, CLASI attorney, nor Ed Speraw, President of the Delaware Manufactured Home Owners Association (DMHOA) are tall in stature. What they lacked in height, they more than made up for in defense of and advocacy for legally deprived low income and Seniors on limited income, who purchased affordable housing on leased land.

On Sunday, September 18, 2016, DMHOA held a dinner to honor Speraw for his retirement. Tuesday, September 20th, the Newspapers carried an announcement of McGiffin's appointment to the Kent County Family Court Judgeship subject to an approval in an October session of the State Senate.

Both men were driven by a passion for fairness and an inner protective instinct to protect the vulnerable. They did what they did in different ways. McGiffin on the legal side, Speraw on both the hands-on solving problems of individual communities and home owners and with advocacy.

McGiffin, who served as Director of the Community Legal Aid Society, Inc (CLASI), currently as head of Dover CLASI Office, and past President of the Delaware Bar Association, has made it clear, problems facing leased land home owners are two fold, the legal and the political. During a multitude of Rent Justification arbitration hearings, McGiffin has stood with his finger in the dike on behalf of home owners on the legal side . He faced a team of attorneys paid with the flood of rent money provided by the tenants.

Speraw who is retiring for health reasons, has been involved long before DMHOA formally became a statewide organization in 2002. He successfully advocated for every single positive law that has been passed since 2002. In the give and take that is considered "The Delaware Way", the laws resemble a woven series of loopholes rather than the safety net they are supposed to be. No matter how ambiguous the Judges find the law to be, it offers some protection where nothing existed previously.

Speraw had the ear and the respect of members of the Delaware State Legislature more so than any other individual. At his retirement dinner, that response was shown by the Resolutions from the House and Senate, and by the appearance of Democratic Speaker of the House Pete Schwartzkopf and Republican Representative Ruth Briggs-King, Democratic Senate Leaders of the fight for Leased Land Home Owners, Senator Bruce Ennis

and retired Senator George Bunting, and Republican Senator Ernie Lopez.

For now, CLASI Attorney Brian Eng, who has worked side by side, with McGiffin, will take up the legal Shield. Vice President Bill Kinnick will take the advocacy Spear as president of DMHOA. Our hope is they have the talent and capacity to become Giants.