

IN MEMORIAM: KEITH McCREA

Keith McCrea, 67, a member of the Energy Bar who practiced law in the District of Columbia for more than 40 years, passed away at his home on September 5, 2014. The cause of death was melanoma.

Keith, a resident of Dickerson, Maryland, was born in Western Pennsylvania. He received a B.S. in chemical engineering from Lehigh University and received his J.D. degree from Georgetown University Law Center. Keith is missed by his wife of 44 years, Penelope McCrea; their children, Conor and his wife Shelly, Chad and his wife Erika, and Caitlin; his grandchildren, Everett and Katherine; his mother, Verna McCrea; his brother, Gary McCrea; and his sister, Sue Lovett. He was preceded in death by his father, Russ McCrea.

Keith was a partner in the Energy Group of the firm of Sutherland Asbill & Brennan since 1990 and previously had been a partner with Squires Sanders & Dempsey, and Grove Jaskiewicz & Gilliam. During his tenure at Sutherland, Keith served in firm leadership, including as the head of Sutherland's energy regulatory practice group and on the Firm's Executive Committee. Keith was regularly recognized by clients and colleagues as among the top energy lawyers in Washington D.C. and the United States by Chambers, The Best Lawyers in America, and Super Lawyers.

Drawing on his engineering background, Keith cultivated his specialty as an energy lawyer representing infrastructure owners and large industrial users. Keith's comfort with the technology underlying the energy industry allowed him to play a leading role in restructuring the natural gas and electric industries in California. Keith advised clients as they lobbied California for the legislative changes that ushered in wholesale and retail competition, and served as part of the team of experts advocating and implementing the laws California ultimately adopted. Keith's influence can be seen in the competitive energy markets that exist today and in how they are regulated at the state and federal levels.

Complementing his efforts in support of more competition, Keith also challenged the wisdom of incumbent utility monopolies, particularly in parts of the U.S. energy markets that are not open to market-based solutions. Keith took great pride in the work he did for clients, seeking to ferret out affiliate abuse and discriminatory market practices, believing that fair and functional markets benefitted consumers, producers and utilities. Throughout his career, Keith built a reputation as a thoughtful, well-prepared lawyer who gave sage, timely advice in a straightforward manner that always cut to the heart of the matter at hand.

These considerable professional accolades and accomplishments, though, capture only part of who Keith was. Just below the calm, understated professional demeanor lived an equally impressive renaissance man of broad interests and experiences. An excellent athlete, Keith played shortstop at Lehigh University, and went on to play semi-professional baseball. An avid outdoorsman, Keith traveled the world carrying a fly rod so that he could enjoy the bounty of nature's streams and rivers—whether it be the trout of Alaska or the West. Never one to discriminate, Keith also appreciated the joy of fishing off the coast, especially Cape Point at Hatteras Island. But it wasn't just the fish—Keith used to remind folks that trout don't live in ugly places.

If you wanted to see Keith happy, all you had to do was ask him about a recent outing. He would smile while recounting what he had caught, the incredible beauty of a river at sunrise and the time he spent with friends and family when the day was done. When he wasn't fishing, Keith enjoyed hunting and competing in sporting clay tournaments.

Keith also harbored a mischievous streak. At a recent memorial gathering, family and friends shared memories of this high-priced Washington lawyer lying in wait to join squirt gun fights while armed with a super soaker equipped with a backpack of extra water. A long-time colleague recalled a dinner to celebrate a successful client pitch. Wanting a bottle of wine fit for the occasion, Keith was disappointed when the waiter told him that the key to the wine cabinet was not at the restaurant. Keith mysteriously informed the small town waiter that he was a lawyer from Washington, D.C. who would be paying in cash “and that's all I can tell you,” but that “things would go better” if he brought a certain rare bottle of wine from the locked cabinet. After several minutes the bottle appeared and Keith, of course, made sure the waiter shared a glass.

Remembering Keith would not be complete without mentioning his farm in Dickerson, Maryland. Keith was often asked why he chose to live so far from the office—wasn't the commute just terrible? Keith would respond by talking about the beauty of the rolling hills, the warmth of the home he shared with Penny and his children, the peace he experienced clearing a field and the pride he took in building so much of what is on the property. The farm was his haven—as one of Keith's partners remarked when visiting the farm, “If I lived here, I'd never go downtown to the office.”

All in all, Keith was a kind, loyal man with a dry wit, a good husband, father, friend and colleague. While he left us much too soon, we take some comfort in knowing that his life was well-lived. His legacy to us can be found, not just in the cases he argued and the precedents he helped set, but in the example he provided of a balanced, happy life full of love for family, friends and the journey of life itself. We were privileged to call him our friend and colleague.