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## ITLA awards Demetrio for lifetime achievement

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The Illinois Trial Lawyers Association honored Thomas A. Demetrio of Corboy & Demetrio P.C. with the Leonard Ring Lifetime Achievement Award on Friday.

The association gives the award annually to one lawyer whose work it believes exemplifies the spirit and ethic of Ring, a trial lawyer who died five months before he could serve as The Chicago Bar Association's president in February 1994.

"For Tom to get the lifetime achievement award is very fitting because he has amazing credentials, and he has contributed to the legal profession and the cause of victims' rights," said Perry J. Browder, a partner at Simmons, Hanly, Conroy LLC in Alton and past president of ITLA who assembled the committee that nominated Demetrio for the award.

Demetrio said while he was grateful to be this year's recipient, he saw the opportunity more as a way to reflect on his ties to the late Ring.

"My relationship with Leonard was so special," Demetrio said. "The real purpose of this award, to me, is to keep Leonard's name in the forefront."

But the award also effectively keeps Demetrio's work and dedication to the legal profession in the forefront, Browder

said, as he has been a powerful mentor to younger lawyers who join his firm.

"It's labeled the lifetime achievement award because it's not something that you get by getting one big verdict or some flashy news thing," Browder said. "It's a combination of many achievements over the years."

Some of Demetrio's more notable achievements came while working alongside Ring in the legal field.

In the 1970s, Demetrio began an almost 20-year stint serving on the Illinois Supreme Court's Committee on Pattern Jury Instructions with Ring — who became one of the committee's first members when he joined it in 1965.

Demetrio said his service on that committee was "the single most important thing" he's done professionally outside of representing clients. He described Ring as the body's voice of reason.

"When one particular member who had a bias for being a plaintiff lawyer or defense lawyer tried to have that bias show through a jury instruction, Leonard would stop us," Demetrio said. "I admired him greatly for his fairness."

Ring later became Demetrio's "biggest vocal supporter" when he successfully ran to be ITLA president — a term that ran from 1988 through 1989 — and Demetrio said he was Ring's loudest



Thomas A. Demetrio

advocate when he ran for second vice president of The Chicago Bar Association — a position that begins the path to presidency.

The two also worked together in the 1980s to establish the Center for Disability and Elder Law, for which Demetrio still sits on the board of directors.

Demetrio's firm acquired Ring's law practice after he died in 1994, and Demetrio said he worked to reach a resolution in each of the firm's outlying cases.

During that time, Demetrio came across a case Ring tried in 1970 but was awarded a new trial five years later. Although that plaintiff hadn't heard from a lawyer about his case for 20 years or more, Demetrio said, his comments spoke volumes to how much his clients trusted Ring.

"I asked him (the client), 'Where've you been?' and he

said, 'Mr. Ring told me be patient.'" Demetrio said.

As a lobbying force in Springfield, Demetrio said ITLA has taken a more defensive approach over the years to push back against proposals from industries and the defense bar to change torts in Illinois.

In ITLA's eyes, it's about ensuring a level playing field for litigants. Many in the public see people hurt around them and assume the same harm can't happen to them, Demetrio said.

"It's not a criticism, but those of us in the trenches, we know we have to protect you even though you're unaware you need protection," he said, pointing out his window at 33 N. Dearborn St. toward the Daley Center across the intersection. "If ITLA wasn't around, that courthouse could be another Block 37. You could put movie theaters in there. That's how effective ITLA has been."

But he's not pessimistic about the court system.

"I am convinced, after doing this for a few years, that jurors get it right," he said. "Our system — the Seventh Amendment, trial by jury, which includes the appellate process — works quite well. It's been easy for me, and a bunch of other guys like me to be involved in the work of the ITLA to preserve and protect the rights of citizens."