

Presentation of the U.W. Law Alumni Association's
Distinguished Service Award on March 18, 1995 to

Rodney O. Kittelsen ('40)

REMARKS BY STUART GULLICKSON ('51)

It is a privilege for me to sketch the career of my friend Rodney Kittelsen that earns him this year's *Distinguished Service Award* for a judge or practicing lawyer.

Our Alumni have presented that award for twenty-eight years. During that time, it has grown into a most significant symbol of professional excellence. Its stature reflects the major achievements of the prior recipients of it. Some of those illustrious honorees are in the audience this evening.

One who celebrates Rodney Kittelsen must include a touch of levity because he's blessed with such a great sense of humor—usually the self deprecating kind. When I called him to congratulate him on receiving this honor, I told him, "I think it's a special one because of the excellent reputations of previous honorees." Rod replied, "If they give it to me, it just shows you how far they have slipped this year."

In a similar vein, Rod tells of his exploits as a bench warmer on his high school basketball team. Early in a big game, some fans chanted, "WE WANT KITTELSEN—WE WANT KITTELSEN." They repeated that chorus intermittently as the game wore on. They roared it at a crucial moment near the end when his team's star player fouled out. Over the din, his



harried coach glared down the bench and shouted, "Kittelsen!" Rod leapt to his feet eager to save the day. The coach rasped, "Kittelsen, go over there and see why those crazy people want you."

Rod is a Wisconsinite to the core. He was born on a farm in Green County, worked his way through undergrad and law school at the UW—Madison, and married Pearle upon graduation in 1940. The couple are justly proud of their three outstanding sons, only one of whom, Rod drolly explains, failed and became a lawyer. In 1940, he practiced briefly in Milwaukee and then joined the F.B.I. for a six-year stint. He returned to his home county in 1946 to establish the law firm in

Monroe that is now Kittelsen, Barry, Ross, Wellington and Thompson.

Our honoree has been admitted to the bar of the United States Supreme Court, elected to membership in the American College of Trust and Estate Counsel, presented the State Bar's *Charles Goldberg Award* for public service, and given the Wisconsin School Attorney's Association's *Distinguished Service Award* for this contributions to school law.

Rodney is a leader, and he generously gives of himself for long stints of public service. He's a former state president of the Future Farmers of America, president of the State Bar of Wisconsin, and president of the Wisconsin Bar Foundation. He

taught in our General Practice Course for three years, and served as District Attorney of Green County for six years, as General Counsel for the national Ex-FBI Agents Association for the last nine, as a member of the Monroe Board of Education for fifteen—twelve of them as president, and as a member of the Monroe Police and Fire Commission for forty-eight years—the last thirty of them as its chairperson.

While he presided over the Monroe School Board, he directed the construction of four new school buildings.

When his city needed a new library, he worked behind the scenes to enable it to receive a gift of a prime site on its down-

town square. Then he quietly helped to raise private funds and to secure referendum approval of the electorate.

Monroe recently expressed its appreciation for his public service when the Jaycees honored him as the community's outstanding senior citizen.

Good lawyers contribute to the improvement of society through their professional work, as well as through public service. To me, such efforts are the most significant of all. I'm indebted to Carl Ross, my confidant and one of Rod's partners, for telling me how Mr. Kittelsen, with the help of his firm, once saved Monroe's telephone company.

They represented a group of owners who challenged the utility's chief executive for mismanagement. They succeeded. The deposed executive reacted by plunging the company into bankruptcy. Mr. Kittelsen presented the bankruptcy court with an imaginative plan to continue telephone service and to pay the creditors in full. It pivoted upon obtaining approval of

the Public Service Commission for, of all things, a rate hike requested by the consumers! The Commission scheduled a hearing in Monroe on the petition for the increase. The proponents had to show that the customers actually wanted to pay more to have the benefit of the Kittelsen plan. He, in turn, devised conduits through which that support could be made known. He explained the merits of his proposal to the local newspaper. It wrote a front page editorial that justified the raise. He informed the local radio station and it presented a call-in show to educate the citizenry. He arranged for supporters to attend the hearing. They packed the auditorium. That unified community action resulted in a favorable PSC ruling. Telephone service continued, but with new, competent management. All creditors, most of whom were local, received payment in full.

The area benefited immensely from the skilled professional services of those good lawyers.

Rodney Kittelsen, the jester, happens to be Norwegian. His son, Jeff, practices law in Korea. Rod visited Jeff during the summer Olympics in Seoul. He returned to the U.S. shores proudly bearing a gold medal. "I won it," he explained, "as a member of the Norwegian javelin team. I was their catcher!"

Being a heroic Viking, he is the unfortunate victim of occasional disparaging "pillaging and plundering" jibes from some of his roguish friends. He defends himself well with his rapier-like wit. On various occasions, he has declared that, "Jack DeWitt could walk into an empty room and blend right in"; that "Myron LaRowe looks better in cheap clothing than anyone I know"; and that "George Steil's rise to fame and power came as a surprise to all who knew him!"

Rodney, on behalf of our more than ten thousand alumni, I am honored to present to you our 1995 *Distinguished Service Award*.