

Legal journal honors city natives

BY TOM RAGAN
(STAFF WRITER)

America's oldest daily law journal, The Legal Intelligencer, has recognized two Hazleton natives with a prestigious award.

Cletus P. Lyman of Lyman & Ash and Thomas R. Kline of Kline & Specter each received the journal's 2014 Lifetime Achievement Award at a celebratory dinner Thursday in Philadelphia.

Lyman and Kline were among 22 luminaries who have helped shape the law in Pennsylvania selected for the award. It is only the second time the Lifetime Achievement Award has been presented by The Legal Intelligencer.

Both men have been practicing law for decades and don't mind being called "Philadelphia lawyers."

In many ways, their backgrounds are similar.

Lyman attended St. Gabriel's school and, after earning his law degree in 1971, joined his father, also named Cletus, at his law firm in Hazleton for five years.

Now, more than 40 years later, he is part of the Lyman & Ash law firm.

"I've been doing the same for 42 years. I've represented many individuals and small businesses that make up my clientele," Lyman said.

He has many fond memories of growing up in Hazleton.

"My family goes back to 1900 in Hazleton," he said. "My parents both had very large families."

Lyman said he lived at 198 N. Laurel St. "and our home was always the place they came back to visit."

He has also tried a number of cases in Wilkes-Barre and Scranton. He handles mostly civil rights and constitutional law cases, and said he has won many decisions in the courtrooms over the years.

Asked for his reaction when he was notified about the award, he said, "I am very pleased by the recognition."

Kline graduated from Hazleton High School in 1965 and was vice president of his senior class. He received a bachelor of arts from Albright College in Reading and obtained his law degree from Duquesne University in Pittsburgh.

Kline lost his wife to cancer in 2004. He has two children - one is a preschool teacher and the other is a playwright. He taught school at the Foster Intermediate School for the Hazleton Area School District from 1969 to 1975.

He feels it is a great honor and a privilege to be a lawyer and has had a number of high-profile cases over the years. Recently, he defended two of the victims of former Penn State coach Jerry Sandusky, a case that reached national recognition and brought the late Joe Paterno and the university's football program down.

Kline takes on corporations for the law firm of Kline & Specter. His law partner is the son of the late U.S. Sen. Arlen Specter.

The name Kline is familiar in Hazleton. His grandfather was Abe Kline, who operated a clothing store on North Wyoming Street known for the big boot outside. The boot is on display at the Greater Hazleton Historical Society museum just a short distance from where the store was located.

Abe Kline's brother operated Kline Brothers Army & Navy Store about two blocks down the street. Hazleton was a thriving and competitive place for clothing stores in those days.

"I grew up in Hazleton, my father ran the Rival Dress Co. in McAdoo, we lived on West Diamond Avenue between Grant and Locust streets," Kline recalled. "People in Hazleton are great."

He said he became a lawyer to help people.

"Whatever I have achieved it is because of the roots I have in Hazleton, the values that were instilled in me and were part of the culture," he said.

In addition to receiving the award from The Legal Intelligencer, Kline has been listed in the Super Lawyer Magazine ratings in the state for the past 11 years.

He is most proud of some of the benchmarks he has set in the legal community and feels that is why he

was selected for the Lifetime Achievement Award.

"I am very honored and very humbled and it is very rewarding to be acknowledged by the publication," Kline said.