

## Michael Anthony Bilandic Receives the Croatian American Bar Association's 2009 Vinodol Code Award



Miki Tesija of the Croatian American Bar Association presents the 2009 Vinodol Code Award during the May 17, 2010 "Celebrating 170 Years of Croats in Chicagoland" event to a representative of the family of Hon. Bilandic, Jan Botica Zekich (Hon. Bilandic's long-time law clerk while he was an Illinois Supreme Court Justice).

Photo Courtesy of Malo Selo Photography and Videography ([www.maloselo.com](http://www.maloselo.com))



The Croatian American Bar Association (CABA) is pleased to announce that the late Honorable Michael Anthony Bilandic is the recipient of this year's CABA Vinodol Code Award in recognition of his distinguished service on behalf of the People of the State of Illinois and his outstanding contribution to the administration of justice in Illinois.

Justice Bilandic was born on February 13, 1923 in the Bridgeport area of Chicago, Illinois and was one of four children born of his Croatian immigrant parents. His father was from a village near Sinj, Croatia and his mother was from the island of Brac. He attended grammar school at St. Jerome's Croatian School (class of 1936) and graduated from De La Salle High School in 1940. Following high school, Bilandic left Bridgeport to attend St. Mary's College in Winona, Minnesota. After graduating, he spent four years as a first lieutenant in the Marine Corps during World War II. He then returned to Chicago and attended DePaul University Law School and received his Juris Doctor in 1949 when he began his private practice of law.

Justice Bilandic's public service began in 1969 when he was elected as an Alderman of Chicago's influential 11<sup>th</sup> Ward. In 1970, then Chicago Mayor Richard J. Daley appointed Bilandic as a member of the powerful City Council finance committee, and in 1974, Bilandic was named chair of that committee. During his tenure as an alderman, Bilandic was called a "legislative trailblazer" by supporters. He was known for his efforts to protect the environment and was the primary sponsor of an ordinance that banned lead paint and phosphates from detergent. Bilandic also supported the Lakefront Protection Ordinance, a bill that regulated condominium conversions along Lake Michigan.

When Mayor Richard J. Daley passed away in 1976, the Chicago City Council appointed Bilandic as interim mayor and in 1977 he was elected as Chicago's 40<sup>th</sup> mayor until 1979. A month after the election, Mayor Bilandic married Heather Morgan and the couple had a son, Michael Morgan.

As mayor of Chicago, Bilandic assisted in the negotiation of labor contract agreements with the city's grave-diggers, butchers, and members of the Chicago Lyric Opera Orchestra. He is also credited with ending the fifteen year dispute over a crosstown expressway, enabling Chicago to use \$1.5 billion of federal money. Bilandic's initiatives also included arranging low interest mortgage loans insured by the city for middle-income families and organizing the first Chicago Fest, the precursor to the modern day "Taste of Chicago". An avid runner, Bilandic lent his support to the first Chicago Marathon and initiated the now eighteen mile lakefront running path by designating five miles of an old equestrian trail as a jogging path.

In 1980, Bilandic returned to the private practice of law and in 1984 he was elected to the Illinois Appellate Court. In 1990 he was elected to a ten-year term as a justice on the Illinois Supreme Court, serving as chief justice from 1994 to 1997. Reviewing thousands of cases during his tenure on the court, Justice Bilandic wrote over 225 opinions.

After leaving a true legacy of great public service, Justice Bilandic passed away on January 16, 2002.

But the late Justice Bilandic was much more than merely the sum of his impressive achievements. He was a man who never forgot his humble roots, and his Croatian heritage was influential in his life. In a February 3, 2003 joint house resolution in which a public building in Chicago was named after him, Illinois House Speaker Michael Madigan and Senator Emil Jones Jr. said:

Michael Anthony Bilandic was one of the more influential and highly regarded public figures in Chicago . . . he was a man of commitment and a loyal Chicagoan; most importantly, he was devoted to his family, faithful to his church, and proud of his Croatian heritage.

He will be remembered not only for his great ambassadorship of Croatian Americans, but also for his dedication to justice for all People of the State of Illinois.



**About the Croatian American Bar Association (CABA)**

The CABA is an association of Croatian-American lawyers and Croatian lawyers from around the world. For more information, please visit [www.CroatianAmericanBar.com](http://www.CroatianAmericanBar.com). The CABA established the Vinodol Code Award to recognize persons of Croatian descent who have excelled in the practice of law and/or made an outstanding contribution to the law or legal scholarship. The award is named after the Vinodol Code (Vinodolski Zakon) written in 1288—the oldest legal text in Croatian and written in Glagolitic letters.