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Palumbo earns highest award from state association

By Peter Bodley Dec 29, 2017

Anoka County Attorney Tony Palumbo has earned the Minnesota County Attorneys Association's highest honor.

At the association's 2017 awards ceremony Dec. 7, Palumbo received the MCAA Johnson Distinguished Service Award.

The award is presented to a county attorney who has demonstrated a history of significant leadership, strived to improve the quality of justice and whose activity has increased and enhanced public awareness of the office of county attorney at the state and/or national level while adhering to the highest ethical standards of the legal profession, according to the state association website.

"I was really surprised, humbled and gratified to receive the award," said Palumbo in an interview. "I am honored."

He credited the hard work of the people in the Anoka County Attorney's Office for making his job easier, Palumbo said. "I thank them for their dedication," he said.

Palumbo is in his second four-year term as county attorney, but he has worked at the Anoka County Attorney's Office since 1977, first as a law clerk, then from 1979 after passing his bar examination as an assistant county attorney before his election in November 2010 as Anoka County Attorney. He was sworn into office in January 2011.

According to Palumbo, he was nominated for the award by Isanti County Attorney Jeff Edblad,

Sherburne County Attorney Kathy Heaney, Washington County Attorney Pete Orcut and Jay Hancuch, Sherburne County director of community corrections.

Edblad made the nominating speech at the awards ceremony listing Palumbo's achievements.

In an interview, Edblad spoke about Palumbo's work with veterans in Anoka County and his leadership in implementing the veterans court in Anoka County District Court.

According to Edblad, Palumbo has also taken a leadership role in elder abuse awareness and prosecution, creating the Minnesota Stop Abuse & Financial Exploitation (SAFE) elder initiative, and has partnered with the Minnesota Attorney General's Office on measures to deal with the opioid crisis.



Anoka County Attorney Tony Palumbo

File photo

Palumbo also represents the Minnesota County Attorneys Office on a statewide task force on community relations that Gov. Mark Dayton created in response to recent high profile, law enforcement shootings in the Twin Cities, Edblad said.

In addition, Palumbo serves on the board of directors and executive committee of the Minnesota County Attorneys Association, he said.

He is also very active in the community, including performing in community theater productions and using his cooking skills to donate meals to various fundraising events, Edblad said.

His community involvement also includes serving as past president of the Anoka-Ramsey Community College Foundation Board, board of directors at Fogerty Ice Arena in Blaine, member of the Anoka Technical College Advisory Committee, former board member of the Northeast YMCA and former coach and judge for the state high school mock trial program.

"Tony is a very well-rounded individual," Edblad said.

According to Anoka County Board Chairperson Rhonda Sivarajah, Palumbo's award is well-deserved, citing his work on elder abuse and efforts to stop human trafficking.

"We are so incredibly proud of you and thank you for your service," Sivarajah said when Palumbo was recognized at the Anoka County Board's Dec. 19 meeting.

Born and raised in St. Paul, Palumbo received a bachelor of arts degree from the College of St. Thomas, St. Paul, and his law degree from William Mitchell College of Law in 1979.

Palumbo began his career as an assistant county attorney in Anoka County handling juvenile matters, then prosecuted difficult child abuse cases for a few years before representing the county in litigation in state and federal courts, according to his biography on the Anoka County Attorney's webpage.

He has advised county departments on data practices, real estate issues, general liability and worker's compensation matters, labor and personnel issues, litigated condemnations for the highway department and mental illness commitments as well as child support and paternity cases, the webpage states.

Palumbo has earned other statewide honors in his career. He was named volunteer of the year in 2006 by the Lawyers Board of Professional Responsibility, received the public attorney award of excellence in 2010 from the Minnesota State Bar Association and was named a lawyer of the year in 2013 by the Minnesota Lawyer publication.

He has really enjoyed his work with the Anoka County Attorney's Office's since 1977, although he left for a short time, two months, to move to Denver, Colorado, to be a business lawyer for a friend, which did not work out and he returned to the county attorney's office, according to Palumbo.

"I consider it a great honor to work at the Anoka County Attorney's Office and for the citizens of Anoka County," Palumbo said.

The county attorney's office has 112 full-time equivalent staff, including 41 attorneys, he said. "That's a lot of people," Palumbo said.

While there are several long-time employees in the office, there has been a lot of turnover in the past seven years as people retire or move to other jobs, he said.

"But there is a high quality of performance from the entry level to the senior attorneys," Palumbo said.

Palumbo's term ends Dec. 31, 2018. He is planning to run for re-election in November 2018.