

Chief Justice Mike Heavican Visits Polk County



ERIN DICKEY - On Friday, August 3, 2018 a set of solid, iron doors welcomed six members of the Nebraska Supreme Court into the dignified courthouse of Polk County, Nebraska. Chief Justice Mike Heavican, Supreme Court Justices Jonathan Papik, Bill Cassel, Jeff Funke, Stephanie Stacy and John Freudenberg made the scheduled stop to the 96 year old building as part of Chief Justice's annual summer tour. Polk County was one of 15 courthouses that Heavican and fellow justices visited during this summer tour.



Located in the heart of Osceola, the Polk County courthouse stands as a symbol of modernity, strength and prosperity. Dedicated in 1922, this symbol would not have been here without the ratification of the 19th amendment and the sound judgment of the Nebraska Supreme Court.

September 21, 1920, a special election was held in Polk County to vote on the proposition to issue bonds in the amount of \$125,000.00 to build a new courthouse. Approved by a very narrow margin of 152 votes, it was the women voters who tipped the scales in favor of the proposition.

It had been just 26 days since the 19th amendment went into effect. Attorneys in Chicago, in charge of signing off on the bonds, questioned the legality of women voting in the election which resulted in the issue coming before the Nebraska Supreme Court for a ruling.



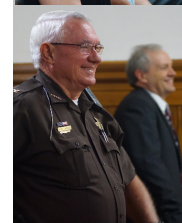
Representing a significant political chapter in Polk County, the Nebraska Supreme Court upheld the legality of the election that authorized the courthouse bonds on October 14, 1921. Considering the general construction of the courthouse began four months before the final decision of the Supreme Court, the county officials could give a sigh of relief as the bonds were delivered and a check was finally received on October 18.

Today, almost a century later the Beaux-arts building, continues to impress those who come through the County Seat.

The vestibule of the 68' by 98' courthouse holds a preview of the grandeur of the structure as clean dress shoes and muddy work boots alike are ushered across the mosaic, geometric pattern of tiles below. From paying property taxes, renewing license plates and getting driver's permits, the courthouse is typically the closest correlation the average citizen has to their government entities.

The open foyer surrounded in white and gray mottled marble easily echoes the casual conversations and every footstep taken as they climb the sets of marble staircases.

As Justice Heavican's tour was about to begin, the third-floor was filling quickly as county board members, community leaders and local and district judicial representatives filled the rows in the gallery of the courtroom. Seven members of the Young Patriots group, along with their leaders sat in the front row, greeting the justices with smiles and outfits of red, white and blue. The coffered ceiling, divided by solid beams of oak complimented the details of the courtroom. Introductions were made by the justices as well as from District Judge Rachel Daugherty. It was noted that this was the largest crowd they had experienced throughout their tour with a big nod going to the presence of Polk County's own, Jonathan Papik being in attendance.





Jodie Roberts, Clerk Magistrate, Ex-Officio Clerk of the District Court, was commended for her services in the start-up of the 2015 pilot program to combine the offices of the District and County courts as a single entity that supports both courts. Deemed an appropriate approach to offer full-time availability to both offices, the program has been successful and has since been adopted in similar counties across Nebraska. Roberts offered Chief Justice Heavican a tour of the offices, judge's chambers and the rooms designated for probation. Stories of Polk County's political history as well as information on leaders who have gone forth from Polk County to make an impact through government services were sprinkled throughout the tour.

In discussing the purpose of the tour, Heavican notes, "It is really important for us to get feedback from our local court staff, from judges, from community members and from lawyers as to how certain programs are working and what we might be able to do better for a particular community or for larger statewide programs. We use that feedback to help make the system better."

