

# Julian McPhillips, The People's Lawyer

*Some nicknames come out of nowhere, others arise from a distinguishing habit or trait. Montgomery attorney Julian McPhillips earned his, "the People's Lawyer," for a dogged style of work, a series of lawsuits over four decades of helping average people battle discrimination and other unfair treatment. ■ His career might have turned out quite differently. A champion heavyweight wrestler in high school and at Princeton University,*

Julian continued wrestling as an amateur while in law school at Columbia University and then while working as an attorney on Wall Street (1971-75).

## A CALLING TO PUBLIC SERVICE

He grew up in Cullman, Alabama (1946-59). His father, a successful industrialist, gave up his business there to become an

Episcopal minister, one dedicated to the social gospel. Like father, like son. After Alabama elected a progressive young attorney general in the early 1970s, Julian felt the call to public service and he and his wife, Leslie, moved in 1975 to Montgomery where Julian was hired as Assistant Attorney General.

Over the next few years, he aggressively prosecuted securities fraud, environmental pollution cases, insurance cases, and fought against obstructionist politicians. In 1978, when his boss ran for governor, Julian ran for Attorney General. Both lost, but the commitment remained. Julian went into private practice as an attorney who specialized in tough cases with a public interest in civil rights, personal injury, employment, and criminal defense. Dubbed the Public Watchdog by the *Associated Press* and the 'Private Attorney General' by the *Montgomery Advertiser*, McPhillips obtained court judgements against three Governors (Wallace, James and Hunt) and one Attorney General (Graddick) for violating the state or federal constitutions.

A civil rights attorney and trial lawyer, McPhillips has received numerous awards from the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. His suits opened up state employment to minorities and challenged police brutality.

## EDUCATION, HISTORY, AND COMMUNITY

Julian's interest in education is a case in point, extending beyond legal practice. As an honors graduate of Princeton, Julian has recruited dozens of bright young Alabamians to his alma mater. He awards an annual scholarship in honor of a deceased brother and helps sponsor a literary contest for local high school and college students through the F. Scott and Zelda Fitzgerald Museum, which he and Leslie founded in 1986. The McPhillipses also own a 100 year old home in Old Cloverdale, historic because it honors the memory of Helen Keller who visited her sister in the home from the 1920s to the 1950s.

Another philanthropic endeavor is the Rev. Julian and Eleanor McPhillips International Center for Racial and Religious Reconciliation created in 2003 in honor of his late parents. Among other projects, the center built a school in Zambia.

Julian remains active in politics. He represented Alabama as a delegate to the 1980 and 2000 Democratic National Conventions and was an early supporter of Barack Obama. In 2002, Julian ran a strong race for the U.S. Senate.

Julian is the subject of a biography, *The People's Lawyer* written by Carroll Dale Short, and published twice by New-South Books in 2000 and 2005.

Today, Julian continues his law practice as the senior partner, founder, and president of McPhillips Shinbaum, LLP. The six lawyer, fifteen employee firm operates from a renovated 1870s Victorian house near downtown Montgomery. McPhillips' partners share his belief that law practice is not just a business, not just a profession, but a ministry. ■



Julian L.  
McPhillips, Jr.

The partners and  
staff of McPhillips  
Shinbaum, LLP.  
516 S. Perry Street,  
Montgomery.

