



Judge Robert Pipia and Ken Kunken / Photo by Anna Kunken

At Nassau DA's office, an 'icon' retires

[Adina Genn](#) //June 12, 2024//

About 100 people, many of them leaders in the law community, attended Ken Kunken's recent retirement dinner, which was held at the Nassau County Bar Association in Garden City.

Kunken, who joined the Nassau County District Attorney's Office in 1982, retired as deputy bureau chief, having served 42 years in the DA's office. Kunken is also the author of "I Dream of Things That Never Were" (Twelve Tables Press), a memoir about the obstacles he overcame after becoming a quadriplegic, following a devastating football injury.

Last week, Kunken's retirement dinner was attended by family, friends, colleagues from the DA's office, judges and other leaders from the community, including Chris Rosa, president and CEO of The Viscardi Center.

Guiding the evening's program of speakers was Dan Looney, deputy executive assistant district attorney.

"Ken Kunken is truly one of the icons of the Nassau County DA's office," said Looney, Kunken's long-time friend who joined the office in 1987.

"Ken is a true prosecutor – he's a brilliant man," Nassau's District Attorney Anne Donnelly said.

Donnelly said Kunken always made time for anyone with a question. That's something Donnelly said she appreciated in her career, adding "Thank you, Ken. You made me a better lawyer."

Judge Robert Pipia, from the Nassau County District Court, like Kunken, is in a motorized wheelchair. He said that Kunken had paved the way for many with disabilities. When he had served as an intern at the DA's office, Pipia made sure to attend one of Kunken's trials "because people with disabilities did not have that kind of role model" otherwise.

Kunken, Pipia said, was "such a trailblazer." For example, Kunken's spinal injury occurred 20 years before the Americans with Disabilities Act, which when signed into law was designed to protect the rights of

disabled people. Pipia attended the law school now known as Maurice A. Deane School of Law, where Kunken had also earned his law degree. "Once I got to Hofstra it was all set up for a guy like me," thanks to Kunken's advocacy, Pipia said.

Pipia said he went on to have a "very rewarding" career at the Town of Hempstead. "I could always call Ken," he said. "Ken would always have sage advice for me."

It was Kunken, who encouraged Pipia to become a judge, and when "I was elected, Ken was probably more proud of me than I was," Pipia said.

Kunken had long aimed "to devote my life to helping others, and to contribute to public service," he said. "The district attorney's office seemed like the perfect place to do it."

Still, Kunken said, "I certainly didn't know anyone with my physical limitations working as an assistant district attorney."

Kunken, who had interned at the DA's office, applied anyway.

"Dennis Dillon, who was a very progressive, forward-thinking district attorney, was self-confident enough to give me the opportunity," Kunken said. "He seemed to know that when I went to court, a jury was not going to base its verdict on my inability to walk but rather on my skill and competence as an attorney."

Kunken went on to thank his supervisors, colleagues and support staff for their guidance and camaraderie.

Looney said Kunken couldn't have accomplished all that he had without his wife Anna and three boys, triplets, Joseph, James and Timothy, all of whom were at the dinner.

"What really stands out in my mind about Ken Kunken is the family man that he is," Donnelly said. "When he met his beautiful wife Anna and fell in love, I thought I would never see him happier."

Once the triplets were born, Donnelly said Kunken's face would light up whenever she asked about them.

That, Donnelly said, is "the measure of the man you are," she told Kunken.