



Richard J. Ceello

August 13, 1948 - November 13, 2021

As the sun rose on a clear and crisp Saturday morning, November 13, 2021, Richard J. Ceello passed peacefully to eternal life surrounded by his daughters and, the love of his life, his wife of 51 years. Born in Chicago, Illinois on August 13, 1948, to Dorothy (Roberts) and Joseph Ceello, Rich lived nearly his entire life in Iron Mountain where he was a force for justice as an attorney and judge.

Graduating from high school in 1966, Rich went on to graduate from Michigan State University in 1970 and Marquette University Law School in 1974. Returning to Iron Mountain, he began a storied legal career. He first joined the law firm of Brouillette and Brouillette. He was appointed Iron Mountain City Attorney then won his race for Prosecuting Attorney. Shortly thereafter, he was approached by the County Board, to become Dickinson County's first full time Prosecuting Attorney and Friend of the Court. In 1978, he was appointed to the District Court Bench by Governor William Milliken and then was elected to serve a full six-year term. He resigned from the District Court Judgeship in 1983 to start the law firm of Mouw & Ceello—which remains one of the largest law firms in the Upper Peninsula—with his longtime partner, John Mouw. For 17 years, he tried cases in virtually every county in the Upper Peninsula and northern Wisconsin.

In 2000, he was appointed to the Circuit Court bench by Governor John

Engler and subsequently elected to three six-year terms. In this role, he presided over criminal proceedings and a wide range of civil cases, conducted jury and bench trials, and wrote opinions in hundreds of cases, including many that were heard and upheld by Appellate and State Supreme Courts.

He understood and took seriously that in every professional interaction he had, he was meeting someone on what was likely the worst day of their lives. He treated every client, every opposing counsel, and as a judge, every person who came before his bench with decency and fairness. He strove to see the basic humanity in every single person he met. In doing so, it was not uncommon for him to receive Christmas cards from some of those individuals in the county jail.

He retired in 2017 from the bench, and spent his time away from “Nonno’s Castle,” as his grandchildren called the Dickinson County Courthouse, playing golf at Pine Grove Country Club in the summer and Arizona in the winter, and traveling to De Pere and Madison, Wisconsin to be with his daughters and their families, including his four grandchildren, who he loved dearly, and who loved to refer to him first as “Nonno” and then, simply, “Richard”.

Nobody will remember Richard Celello for his spotless shirts, precision putting, or disciplined diet. What they will remember is his infectious laugh, keen sense of fairness, and thoughtful, curious probing of personal, political, and global issues. That, and his continual inability to stop merging proper nouns like Two Men and a Truck and Five Guys Burgers into Two and a Half Guys Burgers.

His intellect, commitment to fairness and justice, and curiosity about the world made him an effective attorney and judge. But more importantly, they made him a devoted dad, committed husband, and cherished friend, brother, uncle and grandpa. (Sadly, none of his virtues could salvage his golf game, but his

ability to laugh at himself made him a welcome member of any foursome.) He is survived by his beloved wife of 51 years, Kristi (Johnson) Celello; his daughters Erin Celello and her husband Aaron Olver and Lindsey and her husband Tommy Cianflone; grandchildren Zeke and Max Olver, and Lorenzo and Lidia Cianflone; his siblings Maryanne and husband Mike Zambon, Scott and his wife Shelly Celello, Nancy Santini, Michael and his wife Andrea Celello, and sister-in-law Lisa Celello, along with a large, close-knit family full of nieces, nephews, great-nieces, and great-nephews. He is also survived by brothers-in-law John McCabe, Paul McCabe and his wife Tara and their children, and sister-in-law Karen Johnson.

His infectious, squinty-eyed laugh, big hugs, renditions of “On Top of Smokey” around a bonfire, and dubious Catch Phrase skills will leave an unfillable hole at every family gathering. To say he will be missed is the world’s greatest understatement, though we take solace in the fact that there’s a rocking reunion happening somewhere right now with his parents, Joe and Dorothy, his brothers David and Mark, and his nephew, Marc, along with other beloved friends and relatives who have gone ahead of him to (thankfully, because if anyone could take a wrong turn on the way to heaven it would be Rich who was directionally challenged) show him the way home to eternal life.

A funeral mass will be held Friday, November 19th, 2021, at 11 o’clock a.m. at St. Mary and St. Joseph Catholic Church. Due to Covid-19, the family requests masks be worn during the mass. A celebration of life will be held at a later date, to be announced, when hopefully we can gather more safely together in Rich’s honor.

In lieu of flowers, the family requests donations be made to the Dickinson County Hospital Foundation, where Rich received the most outstanding care toward the end of his life. They would especially like to recognize and thank

Dr. Troy Ahlstrom and his DCHS team, who, in addition to their medical expertise, showered Rich and his family with extraordinary kindness and compassion toward the end of his journey. The family would also like to acknowledge their long time and dear friends along with Nettie Santoni, who kept Rich actively involved in every Packer game watched together.

Condolences may be expressed to the family of Richard J. Celello online at www.ernashfuneralhomes.com

The family has entrusted the Erickson-Rochon and Nash Funeral Home of Iron Mountain with the arrangements.

Previous Events

Funeral Mass

NOV **19**. 11:00 AM (CT)

St. Mary & St Joseph Church

W B St

Iron Mountain, MI 49801

(906) 774-2046

Tribute Wall



“ Dear Kristi and the entire Ceello family,

It was with profound sadness and regret that I read about Rich's passing this past November. Sadness because I had hoped to talk with him again and catch up with each other's lives. We were fast friends from our early days at Michigan State, and Kristi, I so regret that I did not make more of an effort to see you and your family, or stay in touch more often.

On the occasions of visiting Iron Mountain way back when, I was struck by the Ceello family's welcome with open arms, making me feel like a part of the family. Rich was a great friend, and his infectious laugh (and we laughed a lot!) resonates in my mind when I think of him.

*God bless,
Fred Kleinberg*

Fred Kleinberg - May 29, 2022 at 02:47 PM

PF

“ We met few times but that's all it took for me to see Richard was a great man, RIP
*My condolences to the entire family
Pasquale and Giovanna Falbo*

Pasquale Falbo - November 21, 2021 at 05:19 PM

SP

“ Dear Kristi, Erin, and Lindsey,

We only had the pleasure of meeting and spending time with Rich on a few occasions, but he made a lasting impression on us with lively discussions of books, law, food, and family. It is clear that he loved life and the people he shared it with, and his generous spirit will live on in his daughters & beautiful grandchildren. Our thoughts are with you at this difficult time.

*Susan & Bill Parsons
Madison, WI*

Susan & Bill Parsons - November 20, 2021 at 08:51 AM

WC

“ Dear Kristi, Erin, Lindsey and family,

We were saddened to learn of Rich's passing. He certainly was a gentleman to be admired and respected at so many levels. The world's a better place for him to have been a part of it, especially in Dickinson County. The obituary was beautiful, thoughtful and gave a well-rounded picture of who Rich was in a variety of venues. Please accept our sincere sympathy and know that you all are in our thoughts and prayers. There's no doubt that he's enjoying the "rocking reunion" with other loved ones who have passed.

Bill and Jan Cummings

William J. Cummings - November 19, 2021 at 01:10 PM

MS

“ Rich was one of the kindest persons that I knew. I'll never forget the time I was doing a video deposition for him (I was working for KAP Reporting) and when I went to transcribe the deposition, there was absolutely nothing on the video portion of the depo! I had to call Rich and beg forgiveness. God bless him, I didn't even need to beg. He just said something like, "That happens. People make mistakes. Don't worry another minute about it." It brought me to tears, and I will never forget it.

Millie Stearns

Millie Stearns - November 19, 2021 at 11:36 AM

SD

“ Kristi, Erin, and Lindsey,
I have so many fond memories of Rich, he will be deeply missed by so many that he has touched the lives of. Visiting the UP and Iron Mountain 20 years ago for many more years to come for work and having lunch with him were the highlights of my trips! Such a generous man with a gracious demeanor and love for his family. Our sincere condolences,
Love the Dickson family,
Shane, Rachael, Talen, Ashlyn, Caleb, and Brady

Shane Dickson - November 19, 2021 at 09:21 AM

DL

“ Dear Kristi, Erin, Lindsey, and families,
Please accept my deepest sympathy. I have fond memories of Rich becoming a newbie "horse Dad" and all of the fun times we had at the barn and at horse shows. My thoughts are with you all. Diane Luczak

Diane Luczak - November 18, 2021 at 09:53 PM

CA

“ Chuck and Anthony purchased the [Memorial Trees](https://www.ernashfunerallhomes.com/store/Product.aspx?ProductId=4518) for the family of Richard J. Ceello.

Chuck and Anthony - November 18, 2021 at 05:08 PM

AN

“ My condolence to the Ceello family. To Kristi, Lindsey and Erin: Richard was a great and generous man. He welcomed us into his home like we were part of the family. Enjoyed our many discussions.
Your friends from Montréal: Anthony Panichella & Rose Messina

Anthony - November 18, 2021 at 05:03 PM

 Joseph
Cianflone

“ Joseph Cianflone purchased the *With Distinction* for the family of Richard J. Ceello.



Joseph Cianflone - November 18, 2021 at 02:19 PM

 Joseph
Cianflone

“ Our deepest condolences to you all. We only got to meet Richard a few times but deeply enjoyed our conversations and the time our families got to spend together.
--Your Montreal Cousins (Joseph, Marco, Zio Mario and Zio Linda)

Joseph Cianflone - November 18, 2021 at 02:14 PM



“ Judge Celello i worked with for 17 years. He was a mentor, professional and a friend. I always had the most respect for him and his position. My thoughts and prayers for his family. I know he will be dearly missed. Matt Vanni 😊🙏

matt vanni - November 18, 2021 at 02:00 PM



“ Sentiments of Serenity Spray was purchased for the family of Richard J. Celello.



November 18, 2021 at 12:26 PM



“ Dolly Cook purchased the Simply Elegant Spathi phyllum for the family of Richard J. Celello.



Dolly Cook - November 17, 2021 at 04:52 PM



“ I worked with Rich for 20+ years. Rich was a gentleman, so polite and respectful of others and so calm. You will be missed by all. REST IN PEACE MY FRIEND! Dolly Cook

Dolly Cook - November 17, 2021 at 02:11 PM

SA

“ Our heartfelt condolences and prayers for Kristi, Erin and Lindsay during this difficult time. Such a tragic loss of a fine man! It was evident how much he loved his family. Also praying for the entire Celeslo family. Everyone is included in our daily rosary. Love to all!
Sheila and Dennis Aucoin

Sheila Aucoin - November 17, 2021 at 11:00 AM

KC

“ I had the pleasure to know Judge Celeslo before he became a Circuit Court Judge during several civil cases. His demeanor did not change one bit once he became a Judge. He was always pleasant and treated everyone fairly. He will be missed by all those who had any interaction with him. Thoughts and prayers go out to your family.

Kim Coggins

Kim Coggins - November 17, 2021 at 08:54 AM



“ My sincere sympathy. I had the pleasure of working with Judge Celeslo during my tenure at the Iron County Courthouse. I consider him a friend and will always remember his smile and his laughter. A good man who cared about others. His legacy will not be forgotten. Sending caring thoughts and prayers. Sue (Yackel) Passamani Iron River, MI

Sue Passamani - November 17, 2021 at 08:47 AM



“ *Beautiful in Blue* was purchased for the family of *Richard J. Ceello*.



November 16, 2021 at 10:30 PM



“ *Care and Compassion Spray* was purchased for the family of *Richard J. Ceello*.



November 16, 2021 at 09:12 PM

GD

“ Dear Kristi and family, our thoughts and prayers go out to all of you. I lived on East D Street a block up from the Celello family. I got to know the kids and had fun enjoying the summers running around the neighborhood together. Rich was always so nice to speak with and wanting to know how thing's were with our family! A great loss to the Community and the State. May Rich REST IN PEACE!!! Gail and Dick Dabb.

d

Gail and Dick Dabb - November 16, 2021 at 06:29 PM

DC

I worked with Rich for 20+ years at the Courthouse. He was a gentleman, so polite and respectful of others and so calm. He will be missed by all. Rest In Peace My Friend, Dolly Cook

Dolly Cook - November 17, 2021 at 02:06 PM

SK

“ In youth, Rich and I were close friends. We lived a half block apart. We had loads of fun, tempered by some serious conversations about life, the universe, religion and politics. I was there when he broke his leg skiing. He was there when I broke my ankle playing basketball. He taught me to be more outgoing. Alas, as adults we grew apart. I moved away. There were careers to pursue and families to raise.

Rich's passing has affected me more than I expected. Something deep inside and long neglected is amiss. Reading about him and talking with others, I recognize that many of the traits and virtues that he exhibited in our youth served him throughout life. He was smart, inquisitive, empathetic and social. He loved to engage with people. It was his nature.

I extend my heartfelt sympathies to Kristi and the rest of his family. May his memory be a blessing.

Steven Kushner - November 16, 2021 at 05:12 PM

JS

Steven, thank you for sharing this. I married into the extended family and only knew Rich as an adult. Your memories help me envision him in his youth and they ring so true to the outstanding person he became.

Jodie Schroeder - November 22, 2021 at 01:53 PM

DF

“ The whole gang of Formolo's send their deepest condolences to each of you and we grieve with you in this time of loss. May you find comfort with each other and knowing that Richard will be looking down on each of you as is Dave and those who went before him.
RIP

Denise Formolo - November 16, 2021 at 03:27 PM

CD

“ Thank you for making me feel as a part of your family Rich, opening your home to me
(another Canuck) will never be forgotten, you have made a positive impact in my life as well as with countless others...it has been my "Honor" to know you...Rest in Love...Chuck

Charles DeMelo - November 16, 2021 at 12:42 PM