

Infinity Project Seeks Gender Equity and Honors Judge Murphy

> The Eighth Circuit Court of

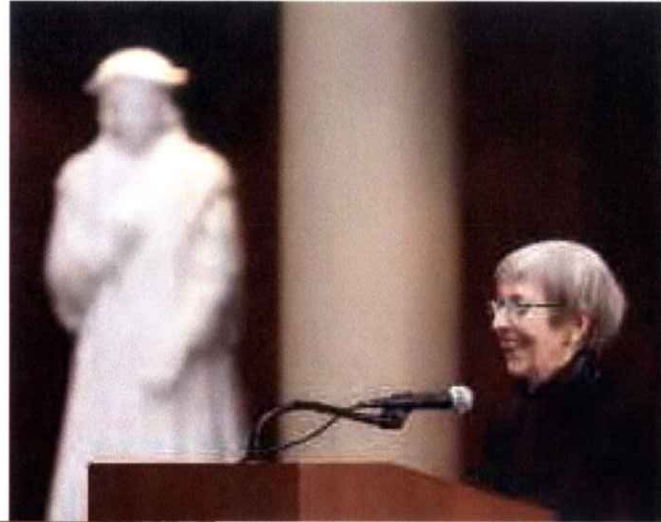
Appeals has a distinction among the 13 circuit courts, one that the Infinity Project is determined to remove: It has the lowest percentage of women on the bench. The Honorable Diana E. Murphy ('74), appointed in 1994, is the first and only woman to serve on the Eighth Circuit since it was established in 1891. Nine judges have been appointed to the 17-member bench during Murphy's tenure—all men.

The Infinity Project is a coalition of scholars, lawyers, and activists working to promote the appointment of women to the Eighth Circuit. Law School Professors Mary Louise Fellows and Carol L. Chomsky have been working closely with the Project's founders: Sally J. Kenney, professor of public affairs and law, and director, Center on Women and Public Policy, Humphrey Institute; Lisa Montpetit Brabbit, assistant dean, University of St. Thomas School of Law and a past president of Minnesota Women Lawyers; Marie Failing, professor of law, Hamline Law School; and Mary Vasaly ('83), past president of Minnesota Women Lawyers and a partner at Maslon Edelman Borman & Brand.

In October, Project members from Minnesota and the six additional states covered by the Eighth Circuit (Arkansas, Iowa, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, and South Dakota) held an organizational meeting at St. Thomas. Current Eighth Circuit Judges Murphy and Michael J. Melloy and law professor Sherrilyn Ifill of the University of Maryland spoke on leadership, judicial selection, and diversity.

In addition, the Infinity Project honored Judge Murphy with the newly established Diana Murphy Legacy Award, created to recognize her extraordinary achievements and contributions, support of women lawyers and judges, and commitment to equal

Judge Diana E. Murphy speaking at the University of St. Thomas School of Law in October, at the inauguration of the Infinity Project's new Diana Murphy Legacy Award to honor her achievements, support of women in law, and commitment to justice



Infinity Project board members gather at the University of St. Thomas School of Law. Front row (left to right): Carol Chomsky, Judge Diana E. Murphy, Sally J. Kenney. Back row (left to right): Marie Failing, Mary Vasaly, Sherrilyn A. Ifill, Lisa Montpetit Brabbit

justice. The award will honor individuals and organizations that advance the position of women on the bench, support the progress of women in law, and uphold Judge Murphy's legacy of excellence.

The Infinity Project, which takes its name from the ongoing nature of its work and from the resemblance between the numeral 8 and the infinity symbol, does not screen or advocate for particular candidates. Its goals are to further public awareness of the importance of gender equity on the bench, to engage politicians on that issue, and to serve as a clearinghouse for potential Eighth Circuit

candidates. More than 100 Minnesota supporters have signed on with the Project since August, and it recently received a \$43,000 grant from the Open Society Institute to support its work.

The Project's success could have significant ramifications. The U.S. Supreme Court draws heavily from candidates on circuit courts; in fact, every justice currently on the high court previously served on a court of appeals. "By not appointing women to the circuit courts," Kenney says, "we are effectively excluding women as potential candidates for the U.S. Supreme Court."