

4/14/2008

TYLER - A ceremony to commemorate the naming of the U.S. Courthouse in honor of former U.S. District Judge William M. Steger is scheduled for noon on May 9 at the federal building in downtown Tyler.

Numerous elected officials, friends, associates and family members of the judge will be on hand for the ceremony, which will include unveiling of the new sign designating the building at 221 and 211 W. Ferguson St. as the William M. Steger Federal Building and United States Courthouse.

Steger, who served as a U.S. district judge in the Eastern District of Texas for more than 35 years, died on June 4, 2006. A pilot in the U.S. Army Air Corps during World War II, Steger flew numerous combat missions, before returning home to attend law school and pursue political office.

His widow, Ann Steger, and other family members are expected to attend the dedication ceremony. Speakers will include U.S. Rep. Ralph Hall, R-Rockwall, who had an office in Tyler's federal courthouse for many years - until he lost representation of Smith County due to redistricting, and U.S. Rep. Louie Gohmert, R-Tyler, who now represents Smith County. Hall introduced the bill in Congress in the summer of 2006 to name Tyler's federal building in Steger's honor. Gohmert cosponsored the legislation.

A relative of the Steger family, Seth Grant of Center, a Life Scout, and Baker Henderson of Tyler, an Eagle Scout, will post the colors. Pam Chesley, a member of the choir at Green Acres Baptist Church, will sing the National Anthem.

Others on the program will include Scott Armeay, regional administrator for the U.S. General Services Administration; two of Steger's former law clerks, Andy Tindel and Matt Flanery; and the Rev. Paul Powell, former pastor of Green Acres Baptist Church in Tyler. The Stegers were charter members of that church.

U.S. District Judge Thad Heartfield, chief judge of the Eastern District of Texas, will preside over the ceremony, which will be attended by several of the other judges in the district. Steger's long-time friend and fellow jurist, now retired U.S. District Judge Paul Brown of Sherman, is also expected to speak at the ceremony.

After about five years of military duty, Steger left the service in 1947 to attend law school at Southern Methodist University in Dallas, his hometown. Upon his graduation in 1950, Steger moved to Longview where he went into private practice. Three years later, he was appointed U.S. attorney for the Eastern District of Texas.

After leaving that office, Steger ran unsuccessfully on the Republican ticket for governor of Texas in 1960 and for the U.S. House of Representatives in 1962. He is credited with helping to make Texas a two-party state and advancing the status of the Republican Party statewide.

On Oct. 7, 1970, President Richard M. Nixon nominated Steger for a newly created judgeship in East Texas, and he was confirmed on Nov. 25, 1970. Through the years, Steger officed in Beaumont and Tyler, and traveled to other divisions to hold court. He had been in Tyler since 1978, holding court in a large, wood-paneled courtroom which still bears his name today.

The judge assumed senior status on Dec. 31, 1987, but continued to serve full-time until his death.