

Fil-Am judge will address PH forum

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Lorna Gail Schofield, the first Filipino-American in the history of the United States to serve as an Article III federal judge.

Judge Lorna Gail Schofield will address the Filipino American Legal Defense and Education Fund (FALDEF) on March 1 in her maiden public appearance after being named the first Filipino-American in the history of the United States to serve as an Article III federal judge, the **Filipino Reporter** has learned.

Schofield, who turned 57 on Jan. 27, was a distinguished attorney with the prestigious Manhattan firm Debevoise & Plimpton LLP since 1988 specializing on complex civil litigation and white collar criminal defense.

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She was nominated by President Barack Obama in April 2012 to succeed Judge Shira Sheindlin (ret.) on the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of New York.

Her nomination was confirmed by the U.S. Senate by a 91-0 vote on Dec. 13 and was welcomed with pride by the entire Asian-American community.

Article III judges are nominated by the President, confirmed by the Senate and appointed to lifetime tenure.

The FALDEF fund-raiser will be held at the official residence of Philippine Consul General in New York Mario de Leon, Jr. on 66th Street in Manhattan.

Details of the program and list of other guests of honor are still being finalized, according to organizers.

FALDEF is also reportedly eyeing as a guest of honor Filipino Pulitzer-winning journalist Jose Antonio Vargas, who came out in 2011 as an undocumented immigrant and helped bring to the political forefront the immigration reform issue.

FALDEF is a national organization that provides pro bono legal services to members of the Filipino-American community who are suffering legal injustices by reason of their immigrant origins and status and unable to engage legal aid and assistance on account of poverty.

It was helped and established by the late civil rights advocate John A. Payton, head of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) Legal Defense and Education Fund.

'Mixed marriage' child

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As an only child born in Fort Wayne, Indiana, and grew up in New Haven, Indiana, Schofield is a second-generation Fil-Am and the product of what used to be called a “mixed marriage” — her late mother, Priscilla Tiangco Schofield, was a Filipina war bride from Batangas City, Philippines, who married an American serviceman.

“My father left us when I was 3,” Schofield disclosed in past interview with The College Magazine of Arts and Sciences at Indiana University (IU).

“My mother came to the United States because of her idealism about the country that had saved her during World War II, and remained here, I believe, because of the stigma and shame she would have suffered had she returned to the Philippines as a divorced woman. She was a pharmacist and stressed achievement, independence and self-sufficiency as essential values.”

Prior to joining the Manhattan law firm, she served for four years as an assistant U.S. attorney in the Southern District of New York, where her significant cases involved prosecuting domestic terrorism, arms smuggling, and tax fraud.

Schofield is “a top-flight lawyer who would be excellent as a federal judge,” New York Sen. Charles Schumer said in a statement shortly after recommending her nomination to the President.

“She would make a uniquely experienced and talented judge on the Southern District Bench.”

As the first Asian-American to be elected chair of the 70,000-member litigation section of the American Bar Association, she has been named a Super Lawyer for five years in a row by Super Lawyers magazine.

In 2008, she was named one of the nation’s 50 most influential minority lawyers by the National Law Journal.

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Magna cum laude

Schofield, double-majored in English and German on full scholarship and graduated Phi Beta Kappa and magna cum laude in three years from Indiana University, and earned her J.D. from New York University (NYU) Law School, where she served as editor of the NYU Law Review and a Pomeroy scholar.

She went to work at the law firm of Clearly, Gottlieb, Steen & Hamilton, and later became an assistant U.S. attorney in the criminal division of the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Southern District of New York, where she worked as a prosecutor on cases involving domestic terrorism, arms smuggling and tax fraud.

As one of the top lawyers in the U.S., she's best known for successfully defending talk show host Rosie O'Donnell at trial in a multi-million lawsuit brought by the publishers of the defunct *Rosie* magazine.

In an interview with the IU magazine, Schofield said representing O'Donnell in 2003 was her most memorable — and most fun — case.

O'Donnell's publishers sued her for \$300 million over her decision to terminate her interest in *Rosie* magazine after the company attempted to seize editorial control from her.

By the end of the contentious litigation, the presiding judge, not content with merely stopping the case, admonished lawyers for the publishing group, saying their case was "ill-conceived."

'Larger than life'

"She's a genius in a completely different way from the lawyers I work with, and she's earnest

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and funny and larger than life,” O’Donnell described Schofield.

Since 2006, Schofield has been a director of Rosie’s for All Kids Foundation, which provides non-profit organizations funding for at-risk children, parents, care-givers and teachers.

Schofield’s law practice reads like best-selling legal novel, according to the IU magazine.

She took the Zenith Electronics Corporation private on behalf of its largest shareholder and creditor, a Korean multinational company, in U.S. Bankruptcy Court; obtained a \$10 million award on behalf of an individually owned business for breach of a finder’s agreement; secured a multi-million-dollar damages judgment in a business fraud case on behalf of a foreign bank; and secured criminal convictions in multiple jury trials as a prosecutor.

“One interesting case was early in my career as a prosecutor, against a group of African-American radicals, defendants who were charged with plotting to blow up armored cars and break political radicals out of prison,” she recalled.

“The verdict was split — an acquittal on the conspiracy charges, and convictions on the weapons possession charges,” she said.

“I guess it was hard to argue with the sawed off shotguns, Uzis and ammo found in their homes. I remember their supporters taunting me outside the courtroom and saying ‘Go back to your country. You don’t belong here. You have yellow skin.’ I was young and stunned that people who themselves had endured racism could be so racist.”

She continued: “I did not feel like a minority student at IU. The atmosphere at IU was fun. It was so big it had something for everyone — culture (high brow and low brow), sports (basketball and swimming), and all the craziness of thousands of kids living away from home for the first time and trying to figure out who they were.”