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The Nettie Cronise Lutes Award, created by the OSBA Women in the Profession Section, recognizes women lawyers who have “improved the legal profession through their own high level of professionalism and who have opened doors for other women and girls.”

It also commemorates the first woman to practice law in Ohio.

At age 98, Judge Capers continues to serve clients and remains active in the legal profession and her community. She still lives in the E. 40th Street neighborhood of Cleveland where her parents, both educators, raised their family.

Judge Capers received a teaching degree from Western Reserve University School of Education and then entered law school in 1941. She received her law degree from Cleveland Law School, took the 1945 Ohio Bar Examination, and passed on her first attempt. That same year, she ran for Cleveland City Council. While that first election attempt was unsuccessful, it heralded many subsequent years of public service.

In 1946, Judge Capers was appointed to the Cleveland Prosecutor’s Office. In 1947, she formed a law firm with fellow attorneys Norman S. Minor and Merle McCurdy. She continued in that practice until she was elected to Cleveland City Council in 1949. In 1950, she was sworn in as the first African American woman to serve on the city council of a major metropolitan city.

She served a total of five terms (10 years).

As a young adult, Judge Capers was active in government. She lobbied local and state legislatures and Congress on many issues including Civil Rights. It was her idea to draft Carl B. Stokes to run for mayor of Cleveland and he became the first African American to hold that position.

From 1960 through 1964, Judge Capers served as an assistant state attorney general. She later became a special assistant to the Ohio Attorney General from 1964 to 1966. In 1977,

Judge Capers was appointed to the Cleveland Municipal Court by then-Governor James A. Rhodes. She served on the bench until her 70th birthday, when state law prohibited her from running for reelection.

Judge Capers is recognized as a student of government, a school teacher, jurist and lawyer. She has received many honors including the Trailblazer Award from the Norman S. Minor Bar Association, induction into the Ohio Women's Hall of Fame, and the Lifetime Achiever Award from the Black Professionals Association Charitable Foundation. In 2005, Judge Capers was honored by the Cuyahoga County Black Women's Forum, which recognized her for receiving the Judicial Council of the National Bar Association's Justice William H. Hastie Award.

Carmen Roberto, president of the Ohio State Bar Association, said of Judge Capers, "She has been a judge, lawyer, community activist and fixture at bar events for many years, always sporting a trademark hat, but those who know her well say not to be fooled by her small stature, soft voice and lady-like appearance. She remains a fierce advocate for her clients and she is a role model for everyone aspiring to reach for their dreams."

The Ohio State Bar Association, founded in 1880, is a voluntary association representing approximately 25,000 members of the bench and bar of Ohio, as well as nearly 4,000 legal assistants and law students. Through its activities and the activities of its related organizations, the OSBA serves both its members and the public by promoting the highest standards in the practice of law and the administration of justice.