Chief Justice Maureen O'Connor N'69

She is the first female Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Ohio – a fact that Maureen O'Connor thinks her Nazareth classmates might find surprising.

But those familiar with her 30-year legal and public service career – defined by an unwavering vigilance toward protecting the public – might argue that the Northeast Ohio native's election to the top spot on the Supreme Court was not only deserved, but destined.

"I have always used my law degree for public service," Chief Justice O'Connor says. "This I find to be very rewarding."

After graduating from Cleveland State University's Cleveland-Marshall College of Law in 1980, Chief Justice O'Connor was a practicing attorney for four years. She was appointed a magistrate of the Summit County Probate Court in 1985 and served in that capacity until becoming a common pleas court judge in 1993. She was elected by her peers to serve as the administrative judge, dually managing her judicial duties and the business of the courts.

In 1995, Chief Justice O'Connor returned to the opposite side of the bench and became the prosecuting attorney for Summit County, prosecuting violators of the law as aggressively as she sought justice for victims of crime. During her four years in that role, she received two awards for which she remains especially proud – the MADD Law Enforcement Award and the Cleveland State University Distinguished Alumnae Award for Civic Achievement.

Chief Justice O'Connor was elected as Ohio's Lieutenant Governor in 1998. Given her extensive law enforcement experience, she was appointed Director of the Ohio Department of Public Safety and chaired the State of Ohio Security Task Force and the State Building Security Review Committee.

She returned to her legal roots in November 2002 when she was elected to the Supreme Court of Ohio, making her the 148th Justice to the Court and the sixth woman to join the Court. Moreover, her election gave the Court its first-ever female majority. She was re-elected in November 2008, and was subsequently elected as the tenth Chief Justice last fall.

"I enjoy my job because of the unique, interesting legal questions we ponder and decide, and because I work with colleagues whom I respect, and because I have a wonderful support staff," she says.

Chief Justice O'Connor credits Nazareth Academy for cultivating an environment that helped her to develop abilities conducive to leadership and service.

"I received an excellent education at Nazareth," she reflects. "I love to learn new things and to discuss ideas and current events and to welcome a challenge. I think those interests definitely took root at Nazareth."

She remembers a class of friendly, fun-loving, smart girls and excellent English and History teachers.

"I still recall Latin class and have found learning Latin to be extremely helpful even now—although I was not the most accomplished Latin student," she admits.

When not busy with her judicial and administrative duties in the state capital, Chief Justice O'Connor enjoys international travel, flyfishing, reading, and spending time with her two sons, Alex, an attorney, and Ed, a chef, and their families.