LEDERBERG, Victoria (SANTOPIETRO)

PJ 12-30-02

LEDERBERG, Victoria (Santopietro) The Honorable

December 29, 2002. Beloved wife of Seymour Lederberg. Residence: 190 Slater Avenue, Providence. Adored daughter of Victoria (Marzilli) and the late Frank Santopietro, Providence. Dear mother of Tobias and his wife Michele Lederberg, Providence and Sarah L. and her husband Jordan M. Stone of Westwood, MA. Loving sister of Richard F. Santopietro, Providence. Devoted grandmother of Risa, Alexandra, Eli, Ezra, Noah and Oren. Funeral Service 11:00 A.M. Tuesday, at Temple Beth-El, 70 Orchard Avenue, Providence. Relatives and friends are invited. In lieu of flowers contributions may be made to the Providence Public Library or Roger Williams University or Rhode Island College. Shiva to be observed at her late residence Tuesday and Wednesday 4:00-6:00 P.M. The family was assisted with the arrangements by SUGARMAN-SINAI MEMORIAL CHAPEL.

High court's Lederberg, 65, ex-legislator, fatally stricken

She is the second associate justice of the five-member state Supreme Court to die since August.

BY TRACY BRETON
JOURNAL STAFF WRITER

PROVIDENCE — Rhode Island Supreme Court Justice Victoria Santopietro Lederberg died unexpectedly of a massive heart attack yesterday morning at home in Providence. She was 65.

Lederberg, of Providence, a graduate of Brown University, had sat on the state's highest court since May 1993. Before joining the appellate court, she had been a municipal court judge in Providence and for 25 years, had taught psychology at Rhode Island College.


LEDERBERG

Before becoming a judge, Lederberg was a prominent Democratic state legislator and represented her East Side district for 14 years, first in the state House of Representatives and later in the state Senate. She ran unsuccessfully for secretary of state in 1982.

Justice Lederberg was the wife of Seymour Lederberg, professor emeritus of biology at Brown, to whom she was married for more than 43 years. She was the mother of two children — Sarah Lederberg Stone, of Westwood, Mass., and Tobias Lederberg, of Providence, a lawyer who became a member of the Rhode Island bar the same year his mother became a Supreme Court justice.

"We're shocked. She was a valued colleague — hard-working and thorough," said state Supreme Court Chief Justice Frank J. Williams. "She will be sorely missed by the Supreme Court, the judiciary and the community."

SEE **LEDERBERG, A-4**



JOURNAL FILE PHOTO / BILL MURPHY

SUMMER FUNERAL: In August, Associate Justice Victoria Lederberg, front right, who died yesterday, attended the funeral in Providence for fellow Supreme Court Associate Justice John P. Bourcier. She was flanked by Chief Justice Frank J. Williams. Immediately behind them, left to right, were retired Chief Justice Joseph R. Weisberger, Associate Justice Maureen McKenna Goldberg, Associate Justice Robert G. Flanders Jr. and other members of the state judiciary.

Lederberg: Death leaves 2nd court vacancy

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Lederberg is the second Supreme Court justice to die within the past five months. Associate Justice John P. Bourcier, who was known for his toughness, hard work and intelligence during his 28 years on the state bench, died Aug. 15 of complications from cancer. His replacement has not been named.

"We've been dealt a bad hand," said Williams. "No judiciary in any state should be put in this position. The strength of the democracy and the judiciary will go on. We are current on all of our cases as she [Lederberg] was on hers. We will rely on ourselves and on retired Justices [Joseph R.] Weisberger and [Donald F.] Shea, as we have been."

Justice Lederberg had seemingly been in fine health, according to her son. She regularly walked the streets of College Hill and from books in the library.

Justice Lederberg graduated from Classical High School summa cum laude, then went on to Pembroke College at Brown University, where in 1959 she graduated with honors with a degree in biology. It was during her senior year at Brown that Victoria Santopietro married Seymour Lederberg, who was just starting his career as a professor; upon marriage, she converted from Catholicism to Judaism.

For a time at Brown — where she also received a master's degree in biology and a doctorate in psychology — she worked with her new husband as a research assistant in the biology department. Like her husband, she had an interest in genetics and co-authored with him a paper titled "Hybridization Between Bacterial Ribosomes."

In 1968, Victoria Lederberg began teaching psychology at saying she lacked the legal qualifications for the post.

Lederberg had never tried a case before a judge or jury and had devoted most of her career to teaching, but maintained she was qualified for the Supreme Court based on her judicial experience on the municipal court.

After she won election to the high court, Lederberg said in an interview, "I certainly have a lot to learn but I'm a fast learner, a good student and I'm not afraid to ask for help."

Once on the court, she steeped herself in the job, soaking in everything she could learn from the briefs, arguments, conferences with the other justices and research in the law library. She considered former Chief Justice Joseph R. Weisberger and the late Associate Justice Bourcier — both of whom had long histories as trial judges — as mentors. And over time, she won over her harshest critics.

did not know her well, Justice Lederberg "may have appeared overly serious or somewhat distant . . . enigmatic." But, he said, she had "a great sense of humor and was very approachable, very compassionate and warm."

"I remember one day I came back from lunch and it had been pouring outside and my shoes and socks were totally soaked and she was concerned about me and told me that I should keep an extra pair of socks in my desk drawer," said Evora. "She was always telling us we needed to take better care of ourselves."

Out of court, Justice Lederberg devoted herself to work and family, living a modest lifestyle. She drove a reliable American car; scoured yard sales to find toys for her grandchildren; liked to wear hats and made a mean matzo-ball soup with pasta.

She doted on her six grandchil-