

Renton graduate and attorney Mark Prothero remembered

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Mark Prothero – prominent criminal defense attorney, Renton High School graduate, and swimming coach – passed away early Saturday morning at his Kent home with family at his side.

Prothero, who waged a two-year battle with lung cancer, was 57. A Celebration of Life is 1-5 p.m. May 10 at Kentwood High School, 25800 164th Ave. S.E., Covington.

Prothero is best known as one of the lead defense attorneys in the historic case against Gary Ridgway, the Green River Killer, from 2001 to 2003. As co-counsel, Prothero brokered a plea deal that spared Ridgway the death penalty in exchange for the Auburn man confessing to 49 counts of aggravated murder.

Prothero had deep ties to the Renton community. His mother Shirley Prothero lives in the family home in Lakeridge.

He graduated from Renton High School in 1974, after becoming one of the best swimmers ever to compete for the school and then the University of Washington.

He was captain of the UW swim team in 1977 and 1978 and represented the United States in international competitions in Argentina, Amsterdam and Paris.

Prothero coached swimming at Kentwood High School in Kent from 1997 through 2007, earning state Coach of the Year honors in 2003.

He was one of 10 outstanding Renton High alumni who were inducted into the school's Athletic Hall of Fame in 2011 as part of the school's Centennial celebration.

For 36 years Prothero held the school's record in the 500-yard freestyle. It was broken in 2010 by then-sophomore Steve Sholdra, who is having a record-breaking swimming career at Fordham University in New York.

Prothero watched as Sholdra won the 500 state title in 2011.

"I respect Mark Prothero so much," Sholdra said in an interview with the Renton Reporter in 2012.

"Hopefully when the next Renton swimmer comes up who can break that 500 record, I can be there to congratulate him too. It's great that he came all the way to state, and I hope I can continue that tradition," he said.

Prothero earned a history degree in 1978 from the UW; his law degree came from the University of San Diego.

Prothero was a partner at Hanis Irvine Prothero, PLLC, in Kent.

Prothero had more than 30 years of experience in criminal defense. He was on the Washington Supreme Court's panel of attorneys qualified to defend individuals faced with the death penalty. He defended those accused of state and federal crimes, felonies and misdemeanors, adults and juveniles.

In addition, Prothero was a frequent lecturer at legal education seminars and recognized for his expertise on scientific evidence, forensic DNA, mental state defenses and the death penalty.



Mark Prothero, right, stands with star Renton High swimmer Steve Sholdra at the state swimming meet in 2010 — *Image Credit: Courtesy Image*

Attorneys who worked closely with Prothero described him as the ultimate professional – caring, compassionate, smart and unflappable.

“He had a wonderfully generous spirit. It pervaded all aspects of his life – the way he practiced law, particularly in the way he treated his clients, which, let’s face it, were always in trouble,” said Todd Gruenhagen, who worked with Prothero on the high-profile Ridgway case and other trials. “He was always able to find positive, redeeming qualities in just about every human being he ever meet.”

Prothero began his career in criminal defense in 1983 by working as a public defender for the Associated Counsel for the Accused (ACA). He began by defending people in the municipal and district courts accused of such crimes as DUI, shoplifting and domestic violence.

Prothero is survived by his wife, Kelly, and two grown children. Sean, a legal assistant, is the swim coach at Kennedy High School. Marley, a standout high school and collegiate swimmer and one-time assistant coach at the University of Nevada Las Vegas, is the coach of the Kent Swim & Tennis Club. He is also survived by brother Blake Emery.

The family asks that any donations be sent to either the Kent Parks Foundation or The Husky Swimming Foundation.

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