



## 2008 Alumni Honor Roll | Reasons to Believe



Role models who give us *Reasons to Believe* in the power of education

**Fernando J. Gaitan, Jr.**

**Sumner High School, 1966**

At 32 years of age, he was one of the youngest individuals named to a judicial position. It was 1991 when Fernando Gaitan was appointed United States District Judge for the Western District of Missouri. Today, he is chief judge and also serves as a member of the Eighth Circuit Judicial Council.

"I do what I do with great pride, great passion and great love. I get up every morning looking forward to the day because it's always something different and new, and I want to do something positive," he said.

Law was not Gaitan's passion when he was growing up. In fact, his only exposure to the field was through his work cleaning the offices of a small law firm twice a week while he was a student at Sumner High School. His interests included basketball and the school choir. The support of his parents enabled him to succeed in school.

"I come from humble and hardworking people who believe in education," Gaitan said. "They emphasized education to me and they supported me emotionally."

Gaitan earned a bachelor's degree in biology and psychology from Pittsburg State University in 1970. After less than a year of working in California, he returned to the Kansas City area and began working for a social service agency called Y-Pals. It was there that he befriended a number of lawyers who were volunteers, and they sparked his interest in the field. He earned his law degree from the University of Missouri-Kansas City in 1974.

Gaitan has received numerous leadership awards over the years. They include: the Urban League of Kansas City Difference Maker Award and the Greater Kansas City Chamber of Commerce Centurion Award. He also was inducted into the Missouri Walk of Fame.

His advice for today's students is find your passion and give it 100 percent.

