

# Just One of the Boys From Pittsburgh County

by Carol J. Burr

**V**irtue may be its own reward, but to Julian Rothbaum, talent, accomplishment and potential for future achievement deserve something more in the way of recognition. To this end, the former University of Oklahoma Regent from Tulsa has established a series of student awards, most in the names of the three friends from Little Dixie whose intertwining careers helped to shape Sooner State history.

The board chairman and president of Tulsa's Francis Oil & Gas Inc. for nearly 30 years, Rothbaum grew up in the small town of Hartshorne, just a stone's throw from the big city of McAlester, where young Carl Albert already was making a name for himself as a high school orator.

"I thought I was an orator," Rothbaum recalls. "I used to go over to McAlester to take oratorical lessons and to hear the county attorney, Frank Watson, who was a wonderful orator—and of course Carl was there. He had won two national oratorical contests."

When Albert ran for Congress from the 3rd District, Rothbaum jumped in to help. "I was his treasurer for 30 years," Rothbaum says of the political and personal friend who became Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives. "Neither one of us ever went to jail—and now the statute of limitations has run out," Rothbaum jokes, then quickly turns serious. "I'm just being facetious; there never was

any question about our finances."

Nor was there ever any question of his pride in Albert's distinguished career. "I had in mind establishing an award at every place that he had gone to school," Rothbaum explains, "which I did. There is the Carl Albert Medal at McAlester High School, where he was valedictorian; the Carl Albert Award in the College of Arts and Sciences at OU, where he got his B.A. and was Phi Beta Kappa; and the Carl Albert Award at St. Peter's College at

**Julian Rothbaum has received every honor the University bestows, but he is proudest of the awards he presents to others.**

Oxford, where is he was a Rhodes Scholar. All are for *the* outstanding student."

Rothbaum, who received a B.A. in government and a law degree from OU, paid similar tribute to his own academic experience. He established the Julian J. Rothbaum Valedictory Award at Hartshorne High School, the Julian J. Rothbaum Award in Petroleum Land Management at OU and the Julian J. Rothbaum Award for the outstanding book published annually by the University of Oklahoma Press. He completed the circle by establishing an award in the Rothbaum name for the outstanding sophomore at the two-year institution bearing the name of his Little Dixie colleague, Carl Albert State College

at Poteau. All the award funds are endowed.

Rothbaum became acquainted with the third member of the "Pittsburgh County Boys," George Nigh, when the genial McAlester school teacher ran for the legislature. "I've known him all his political life," Rothbaum says, "which is a long time. He says he was born in the lieutenant governor's office."

Nigh, whose lengthy tenure in Oklahoma's number two office eventually led to two terms as governor, is now president of the University of Central Oklahoma in Edmond. In 1980 Rothbaum honored Nigh by establishing an annual award for the outstanding student at East Central State University in Ada, Nigh's alma mater. Last year he demonstrated his support of his friend's newest assignment by endowing the Julian J. Rothbaum Gold Medal Award for the outstanding student at UCO.

At the age of 81, Rothbaum is still actively working for Democratic political candidates, particularly if they hail from Pittsburgh County or are the offspring of his old allies. In 1994 he supported Nance Diamond—an unsuccessful candidate for lieutenant governor and granddaughter of the late state political power, James Nance—and Drew Edmondson, a successful candidate for attorney general and son of Rothbaum's good friend, the late Congressman Ed Edmondson. While supporting the political aspirations of others, however, he has never had a desire to jump into the arena himself.

"I always wanted to be in the smoke-filled rooms, to be a part of it. I've been in campaigns going back to Josh Lee when I was at OU," he says, referring

to the University speech professor who was elected to the U.S. Senate in 1936. "I admired Josh because he was a great speaker; he wrote that book, *How to Hold an Audience Without a Rope.*"

Rothbaum points out that Lee's campaign actually was run by Leonard Savage, '30 B.A., '30 L.L.B., later an OU Regent, and his brother Royce, '25 B.A., '27 L.L.B. The Savage brothers also served on the University of Oklahoma Foundation Board of Trustees, as Rothbaum has since 1988. "Royce, by the way, was the grandfather of the current mayor of Tulsa," Rothbaum adds. "They were Little Dixie people from Blanco, a little coal-mining camp south of McAlester."

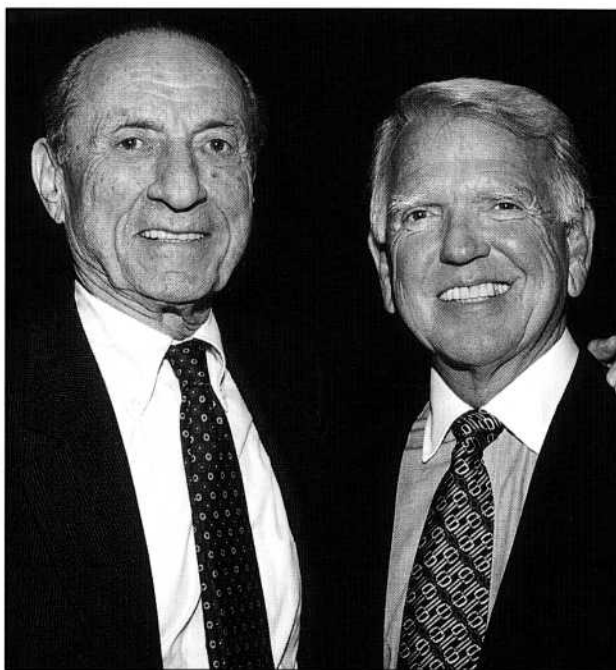
Little Dixie politics has always carried the irresistible element of risk for Rothbaum and his friends. He recalls, for instance, waiting in the hallway while Albert delivered a speech in McAlester. A man who recognized him as being with Speaker Albert approached him with an emphatic request to have his soldier son returned from France to attend to his seriously ill mother. As the man insisted, "I want him home!", Rothbaum noticed that he had a .45 revolver stuck in his waistband.

"That got my attention," Rothbaum recounts. "I told the Speaker, 'Now we're going to give this man first class service, none of that bureaucratic talk.' And Carl said, 'We'll go to work on that immediately.'"

Besides their allegiance to their "roots" in Pittsburgh County, Rothbaum and Albert share a lifelong pride in having attended the University of Oklahoma. "He never bragged particularly on St. Peter's," Rothbaum says of Albert, "but always on OU."

While Albert went on to serve the nation, Rothbaum was able to concentrate his public service closer to home.

Most recently, he served as Governor David Walters' special adviser on higher education, but in 1959, he was Governor J. Howard Edmondson's first appointment to a seven-year term on the OU Board of Regents. Governor Nigh appointed him to a second term in 1979 and would have reappointed him to a third term, but after a total of 14 years on the OU board, Rothbaum



*Julian Rothbaum, left, has backed the career of fellow Pittsburgh County native George Nigh into the legislature, the lieutenant governor and governor's offices and now the presidency of the University of Central Oklahoma at Edmond. He has honored his old friend with two endowed student awards.*

opted instead for appointment to the Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education.

Several months later, the old political pro found himself the victim of a shift in parties. Republican Governor Henry Bellmon discovered a law limiting membership on the state regents to no more than three persons from any one institution. Since another regent had briefly attended OU, Rothbaum became the fourth Sooner on the board.

"Now they have changed it to being a graduate," Rothbaum explains, "but

at the time I was the fourth appointment, and technically Bellmon was right."

Rothbaum already had had some experience with the politics in higher education during his first term on the OU board during the Edmondson administration.

"Young Howard was a marvelous politician, a master politician,"

Rothbaum recalls, "the first political figure in Oklahoma to really use television. He was such a handsome young man, you see, and he campaigned on television in the mornings when the housewives were all home so that he could appeal to that vote. There used to be a saying that the older women wanted to mother him and the young ones wanted to make love to him.

"But Edmondson (as governor) really gave Oklahoma people a break," Rothbaum insists. "He put in central purchasing and the state merit systems; he tried to take the road money away from the county commissioners—but they beat him on that. And of course, he appointed me to the OU board," he adds wryly.

But Rothbaum soon found himself in an awkward position. The governor and three of his four regental appointees were at odds on several issues with the University's president, George L. Cross.

The word went out that Edmondson would like to see a change in presidents. Rothbaum, as the remaining Edmondson appointee, was the swing vote on the seven-member board. A great admirer of Cross, he refused to go along.

The story is one of Rothbaum's favorites, and his ability to halt any action against Cross is one of his greatest sources of pride. He also was pleased to be named in Barry Switzer's book, *Bootlegger's Boy*, as a regent Switzer especially liked. "Barry and I always got along fine,"

***“Barry and I always got along fine. He is a great coach.”***




*Julian Rothbaum's support and advice has been important to every OU president since George L. Cross. Here he congratulates David Boren at the May public announcement of his appointment as the institution's 13th president.*

of Oklahoma Press brought another endowment to provide a \$1,000 prize for the author of the outstanding publication of the year. “We have such a fine press,” he says. “Look at the awards they have won. In England, they pick up these books and say, ‘Look at this—published at the University of Oklahoma in Norman, Oklahoma.’ Some presidents have overlooked the Press, thought of it as an auxiliary thing. But you don’t have to tell David Boren about the OU Press.”

The awarding of honors has not been a one-way street, however. A member of the Oklahoma Hall of Fame and first chairman of the Carl Albert Commission, he has received nearly every distinction his alma mater has to offer—the 1974 Distinguished Service Citation, a 1993 honorary doctor of humane letters degree, an inaugural 1993-94 College of Arts and Sciences Distinguished Alumni Award,

membership in the Academy of University Fellows, election as an honorary member of Beta Gamma Sigma national business honorary and an alumni member of Phi Beta Kappa.

In 1983, his wife and son, Irene Rothbaum and Joel Jankowsky, '65 B.B.A., '68 J.D., a Washington, D. C., attorney, endowed the Julian J. Rothbaum Distinguished Lectureships in Representative Government. The biennial series brings some of the nation's outstanding public figures and eminent academicians to the campus.

Rothbaum is always on hand for the lectures—sharing experiences, asking questions, eager to learn something new from the guest speakers and the supporting cast of faculty and students. Given his lifetime in the trenches of political life and public service, it is difficult to imagine what that might be. 



he says. “He is a great coach.”

One of the strongest friendships he formed while serving as an OU regent was with Barbara Tuttle, now executive secretary emeritus to the board. As with others he admires greatly, Rothbaum decided to honor Tuttle's retirement by endowing a graduate student award in her name in the area of her choice, which was the School of Music, where she had studied as an undergraduate.

His admiration for the University

*Many a political stratagem has passed between these two state veterans, Julian Rothbaum, left, and the long-time Washington aide to Carl Albert and David Boren, Charles L. Ward, '48 B.A., now of Tulsa, shown here at the public announcement of Boren's OU appointment.*