



At the Top of His Game

Oklahoma's Bill Paul is accustomed
to finishing first—
at the University, in the military,
in the legal and corporate world
—and now as president
of the American Bar Association.

Bill Paul always wanted to be a lawyer. Growing up on a farm, he seemed predestined to live in nearby Pauls Valley—the town his great-great grandfather founded. He was meant to be the person his father was, a local lawyer and farmer folks could look up to.

But Paul did not stay long in his hometown—and in leaving he carved his own place in legal history.

“I suppose you could say I was ambitious,” Paul, 69, says of his desire to leave his hometown, head off to the University of Oklahoma and study law. “It would be more accurate to say that I was driven.”

Driven, not only to be a lawyer, but also to rise to the top of his profession. In 1998 he realized that goal with his selection as president-elect of the American Bar Association.

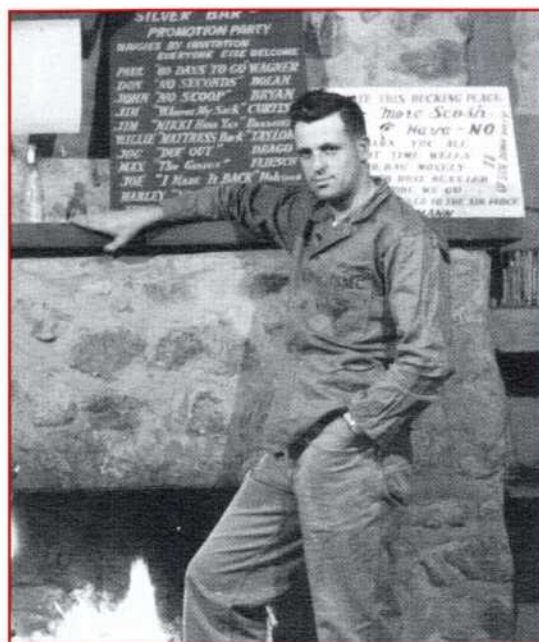
Last fall, Paul was inducted as president. Now he is an ambassador for the Oklahoma City firm of Crowe & Dunlevy, for OU and for his home state as he travels, speaks and works on behalf of the 400,000 lawyers he represents.

“Lawyers Serving Society in the New Millennium” is Paul’s theme as ABA president. As he addresses professional gatherings, banquets and attends a variety of other events, he advocates accessibility to legal services. He pushes for technological advances that will allow clients to access legal information via the Internet. He touts equality of race and gender in the practice of law.

It is a job he prepared for all his life. Even as he finished his undergraduate degree in 1952, graduated from the College of Law in 1956, joined Crowe & Dunlevy in 1957, then spent 11 years as general counsel for Phillips Petroleum, he was planning ahead to the day when he could help initiate changes through a role with the American Bar Association. Not even his time spent as a Marine lieutenant serving in Korea could deter him from his first love—the law.

“I began to think of running for the ABA presidency 24 years ago,” Paul says. “You go through a process of years with the association . . . it takes 20 years of work to be a candidate for this position. The process is very political; you have to have friends all over the country. You have to be articulate—very good on your feet.

“It’s the extension of a good litigator, this presidency,” Paul concludes.



Colleagues in Oklahoma and around the nation say they are supportive of Paul’s agenda and use words like “natural” and “respect” and “class” to describe him and his wife, Barbara.

Ellen Rosenblum, a circuit court judge in Portland and an active ABA member, says she and Paul became acquainted when they sat next to each other on the Board of Governors.

“I used to read drafts of his speeches while he would work on them at board meetings,” says Rosenblum, who plans to run for ABA secretary next February. “He asked me to read one and, after that, I would help him with ideas and editing.”

Their participation in the same “class” of governors found them seated together at dinners with other members, Rosenblum says. Dinners with Paul always include entertainment.

“These dinners . . . quickly developed into a “sing-a-long” format, always including, of course, a very loud rendition of ‘OKLAHOMA!’ in honor of Bill and Barbara,” Rosenblum says. “There are only a few like him, that’s for sure.”

Ralph Thompson, United States District Judge for the Western District of Oklahoma, says he admires Paul most because of his farm-boy origins, his ambition and

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Top of page: Named the outstanding NROTC cadet all four undergraduate years at OU, Bill Paul spent 1952-54 on active duty as a Marine lieutenant, including a tour in Korea, eventually retiring in 1975 as a colonel in the Marine Corps Reserves.

In 1998, Bill and Barbara Paul made a site visit to prepare for the July 2000 ABA meeting in London. Of particular significance to the ABA president-elect was the Magna Carta memorial on a hill overlooking the plain at Runnymede, where King John signed the charter of English political and civil liberties in 1215.



his desire to excel.

"I have written an article and I have given a speech called 'From Modest Beginnings,' out of respect and love for our state and the examples of people who have achieved from modest beginnings," Thompson says. "They are too numerous to mention, but one of them is William G. Paul."

Thompson believes that from his earliest days Paul supplied the energy and ambition; OU and Oklahoma gave him the opportunity to succeed.

"He was exceedingly bright," Thompson says. "In fact . . . this young man off the farm scored the highest grade on OU's placement exam of any student since such records were kept."

"He was ambitious. He was determined. He wanted to be a leader, and he wanted to be a lawyer."

This summer, Paul will lead a contingency from the ABA to England, where he will meet with heads of state, those with interests in the law and other officials. During the trip, Paul will place a marker at Runnymede, where the ABA erected a memorial to Magna Carta several years ago. He wrote the inscription for the new stone.

"I spent a long time writing the verse," Paul admits. "It's a little intimidating to think that future gen-

erations will be looking at these words for all time."

The 3-foot-by-5-foot marker will read as follows:

*15 July 2000
The American Bar Association
returns this day
to celebrate Magna Carta
foundation of the rule of law
for ages past
and for the new millennium.*

The words are simple, yet full of meaning, Paul says.

His friend, Tulsa attorney Jim Sturdivant, agrees.

Sturdivant, also an OU alumnus, has known Paul nearly his entire professional life. During their OU days, Sturdivant remembers that Paul was a Big Man On Campus while he was a lowly freshman.

Sturdivant credits his friend's success to his ability to disagree without being disagreeable, to refute without being disrespectful. He sees Paul as the consummate people person.

"Bill is universally respected in the ABA, even by those on opposing sides," Sturdivant says. "On the rare occasion where his point of view does not prevail, he takes his licks and moves on."

Those times have been very few during the last year. Paul has stepped up to the challenge of trying to carve a new image for his profession, even as others seek to tear it down.

In February, Paul sent a letter to California Governor Gray Davis saying he was deeply concerned over the governor's controversial comments on judicial appointments.

Paul wrote to Davis "out of deep concern over your recent comments regarding your belief that the judges you appoint should 'keep faith with the representations that (you) made to the electorate' when they are deciding cases."

Davis immediately tried to smooth over the legal community's concerns. In response to Paul's letter, his office issued a statement asserting his full respect for the independence of the judiciary.

"Governor Davis seemed to be of the mind that judges should pursue the political agenda on which he was elected," Paul says. "Judicial appointees should be independent, and this is fundamental in a democracy. Ours is the last place in the world where you should want short-term politics to have a role in the decisions made by judges."

As he tours the country these days making planned and unplanned speeches, Paul admits he is putting in



Just two days before being inducted as American Bar Association president, Bill Paul, left, welcomes President Bill Clinton, who spoke to the 1999 ABA Annual Meeting in Atlanta.



more than his share of hours. However, he knows the presidency will end in a few short months, and he wants to make the most of every moment he has to advance the work of the legal profession.

Sturdivant hopes his friend “takes time to stop and smell the roses” after his term as president ends. “He’s spent lots of Fridays at Will Rogers World Airport going to Chicago on the red-eye flight, spent a lot of Saturdays and Sundays in board rooms with no windows. As for me, I’d rather be playing golf.”

Barbara Paul should receive as much credit as her husband for his role in the legal community, Sturdivant says. The daughter of the long-time business manager for OU Student Publications, Cecil Brite, Barbara Paul is also a University graduate.

“Bill has a wonderful wife who’s supported him all along the way,” Sturdivant says. “She’s been his biggest supporter.”

No one agrees more with that statement than Paul himself.

“Fortunately, my wife, Barbara, has taken up more than her share of the responsibility for our family and home,” Paul says. “She’s a wonderful wife and mother.”

Barbara Paul also is her husband’s companion on ABA trips and tries her best to keep the mood light, even when the speaking engagements, obligations and deadlines press down on her husband.

“She doesn’t do the one-night stands, but she’s usually right there with me otherwise,” Paul says. “And she’s always telling me I’m going to die with a phone stuck to my ear, talking law.

“Personally, I can’t think of a better way to go.”

U.S. Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O’Connor, left, and ABA President Bill Paul were featured speakers at the September 1999 dedication of the University of Oregon’s new College of Law building.