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ALUMNI INDUCTED INTO

ORDER

OF THE

OWL

BY JESSICA R. JONES





Michael Burrage



Kathy Taylor



Ralph G. Thompson



Lee West

In a night full of laughter and heartfelt tributes, the University of Oklahoma College of Law had the privilege of inducting four distinguished alumni into the Order of the Owl Hall of Fame. Michael Burrage ('74), Kathy Taylor ('81), Ralph G. Thompson ('61) and the Lee West ('56) became the third class of inductees honored at an October 30 dinner in the Molly Shi Boren Ballroom of Oklahoma Memorial Union.

The Order of the Owl recognizes OU Law graduates who have made an indelible mark on the legal profession. The honorees are chosen based on their demonstrated leadership and service through outstanding accomplishments in their careers. Each inductee is presented with an owl sculpture created by OU Art Professor Sohail Shehada. Nine prominent alumni have previously been inducted into what inaugural inductee Bill Ross dubbed "the Parliament," meaning a group of owls. Four previous recipients were in attendance this year to honor the newest inductees.

The evening started with an opening reception for approximately 470 alumni and friends of OU Law. A feature video was shown of several OU Law students expressing their gratitude for the support of OU Law alumni. The program began with remarks from OU President David L. Boren ('68) and Dean Joe Harroz.

After an elegant dinner, Harroz introduced the honorees, highlighting the impressive accomplishments of each. Prior to the event, OU Law sought comments from dear colleagues and friends of each inductee. Harroz included the heartfelt and entertaining comments in his introductions of the honorees. In addition, four outstanding law students were chosen to present each recipient with their award.

Michael Burrage

CLASS OF 1974

Michael Burrage, a member of the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma, was born in Durant, Oklahoma. He received a bachelor's degree from Southeastern Oklahoma State University in 1971, and earned a juris doctor degree with honors from the University of Oklahoma College of Law in 1974.

Following law school, Burrage was in private practice in Antlers, Oklahoma, from 1974 to 1994.

During that time, he was named Outstanding Young Lawyer in Oklahoma in 1977 and served as president of the Oklahoma Bar Association in 1990.

In one of the funnier moments during the acceptance speeches, Burrage explained how he and fellow honoree Lee West had both lived in Antlers and invited a friend to the celebrations of high points in their careers. Burrage quoted his friend as saying, "I told you, Mikey, if you and Lee Roy will ever get an important job with the government – like being on the Pardon and Parole Board – we'll come."

In 1994, President Bill Clinton nominated Burrage to be a United States district judge and he was confirmed by the U.S. Senate on June 8, 1994. Burrage served as a federal judge for all three of the U.S. District Courts in Oklahoma (Western, Northern and Eastern).

Burrage gave credit to his law school classmate, Molly Shi Boren, for assisting him in getting appointed. "Most federal judges, if not all, are appointed because of merit, because they're so damn smart, and so they get appointed to the bench. That wasn't me. That wasn't me at all. I think the reason I got appointed is because I became friends with Molly in law school."

In 1996, Burrage became the chief judge of the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Oklahoma, where he served until 2001. He is now senior managing partner at the Whitten Burrage Law Firm in Oklahoma City.

Jason Callaway presented the award to Burrage. Callaway is a third-year law student who currently serves as managing editor of the *Oklahoma Law Review*. Following graduation, he will be clerking for Judge Claire Eagan of the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Oklahoma.



Michael Burrage, Jason Callaway and Dean Joe Harroz

"I have never seen a lawyer more universally respected and admired. I have never seen a lawyer who knew the law better than Mike. I have never seen a lawyer who knew strategy better than Mike. I've never seen a lawyer who worked harder, prepared better or worked longer days and nights than Mike."

– Reggie Whitten ('80)

"In now, my more than 20 years practicing law, I have never met a more prepared or harder working attorney than my dad. When I think about it, I realize that I should be a lot better lawyer than I am just because I'm his son."

– Sean Burrage ('93)

Kathy Taylor

CLASS OF 1981

"She was the heart and soul of our firm's social gatherings and also the heart and soul of our firm's social conscience. She never let us forget about the real world out there as she led by example and showed us constantly how fun and important it was to stay engaged."

– Valerie Couch ('83)

"In addition to Kathy's energy, passion and substantive skills, she possesses that rare ability to, like a good point guard in basketball, make everyone around her better."

– Steve Davis ('83)

Kathy Taylor, the second inductee of the evening, earned her juris doctor degree from the University of Oklahoma College of Law in 1981. As an attorney, Taylor worked with Oklahoma-based corporations including Sonic and Thrifty Car Rental. In 2003, she was appointed Oklahoma's secretary of commerce, tourism and workforce development – the first cabinet secretary given responsibility for leading three separate state agencies – and served until 2006.



John Hammons, Kathy Taylor and Dean Joe Harroz

Taylor was elected mayor of Tulsa, Oklahoma, in a 2006 election with record voter turnout for a mayoral election. As mayor, she oversaw the completion of Tulsa's "Vision 2025" projects, including the BOK Center. Taylor also advocated for a successful \$450 million street bond issue and construction of a new downtown baseball park. She supervised the move of Tulsa's city hall and has continued to be involved in the advancement of the Tulsa community.

In 2009, Taylor became Oklahoma's chief of education strategy and innovation. During her time in this position, she spearheaded a reform plan that became law with the passage of the Oklahoma Teacher and Leader Effectiveness Act.

Taylor was inducted into the Oklahoma Women's Hall of Fame in 2011. In 2012, she served as a resident fellow at the Harvard Kennedy School Institute of Politics, teaching a course on the Pathways to Public Service.

In accepting her award, Taylor expressed appreciation to the "compassionate professors, empathetic administrators, and generous donors" who helped her overcome losing both of her parents while she was in college and provided her a home.

To her fellow OU Law alumni, Taylor said, "I thank you for staying involved with the University of Oklahoma and the College of Law because what you do every day makes a kid like me able to achieve her dreams."

John Hammons, a second-year law student presented Taylor's award. Hammons served as the mayor of the city of Muskogee from 2008 to 2012, starting at the age of 19. Hammons is among the youngest mayors in American history. He hopes to use his legal training to help grow Oklahoma businesses and strengthen its economy.

Ralph G. Thompson

CLASS OF 1961

At age 40, Ralph Thompson, was one of the youngest federal judges in the nation. He served on the U.S. District Court for the Western District of Oklahoma after President Gerald Ford nominated him September 24, 1975. He was confirmed by the U.S. Senate and received his commission in October 1975. He served as chief judge from 1986 to 1993. Thompson assumed senior status on December 16, 1999, and served in that capacity until August 6, 2007.



Lindsey Campbell, Ralph G. Thompson and Dean Joe Harroz

A 1961 graduate of the OU College of Law, he was in private practice in Oklahoma City from 1961 to 1975. He was a member of the Oklahoma House of Representatives from 1966 to 1970 and was an assistant minority leader during that time.

"There's not a doubt in the world that the quality of my OU legal education and the prestige of my OU law degree made possible the opportunities in my professional career that allowed me to fulfill my highest aspirations," said Thompson.

Born in Oklahoma City, Thompson is the grandson of Dr. William Bennett Bizzell, OU's fifth president, and is part of a three-generation OU law alumni family. Thompson reflected on his first day of law school and the journey to this point. "Well, from that anxious, uncertain, and uneasy moment, to the honor of this proud moment, is a distance that seems as far as it is unlikely. So I'm sure you can understand how humbled and proud I am to be inducted into my law school's hall of fame."

Thompson also received a bachelor of business administration degree from OU in 1956. He served as a lieutenant in the U.S. Air Force from 1957 to 1960 and a colonel in the U.S. Air Force Reserve from 1961 to 1987.

In 1995, Thompson was inducted into the Oklahoma Hall of Fame. Last year, the University of Oklahoma awarded Thompson the honorary doctorate of humane letters, the university's highest honor.

Presenting the award to Thompson was second-year student Lindsey Campbell, this year's recipient of the Lee B. Thompson Sr. Scholarship. A former National Merit Scholar, Campbell plans to use her law degree to advocate for those who might otherwise not have access to legal service.

"He would have been a highly successful lawyer in private practice, but his calling was the federal bench. And all of us who love Oklahoma are better for it. Ralph is also a warm and wonderful friend who is the patriarch of a remarkable family of over-achievers."

– **DeVier Pierson ('57)**

"Ralph Thompson was created to be a U.S. district judge. He is intuitive, he is intelligent, he is kind, he is fair and he respects the law more than his own self interests. Ralph was a great judge. He is a great lawyer. He is a great Oklahoman. And as far as I'm concerned, the most important thing is that he is my great friend."

– **Bill Ross ('54)**

Lee West

CLASS OF 1956

"When he was appointed to the federal bench in 1979 the Western District docket was crowded, and the judges were behind their desired schedule to get cases to trial. So Judge West started working overtime and at night. Soon after, he was in a conversation with the presiding judge, Fred Daugherty, and another judge, Luther Eubanks. Judge Daugherty said, 'Judge West, you shouldn't be working at night. Remember, this is a lifetime appointment.' To which Judge Eubanks added, 'That's right, and the way you're going, it'll last about six months.'"

– **Bill Paul ('56)**

"His strength, courage and hopes for this nation to achieve the dream of liberty for all citizens are unequalled. This republic remains free and self-governing because of people like Lee West and the other recipients of our honored profession who are here tonight."

– **Hank Meyer**

The final inductee of the evening was Lee West.

West started his life in Pushmataha County, where he was born and raised. After graduating from Antlers High School in 1948, he attended OU and graduated in 1952. He was then commissioned as a second lieutenant in the U.S. Marine Corps and served more than two years, spending time in both Japan and Korea. Returning to the states, he attended OU Law and graduated in 1956.



Robert Brossett, Lee West and Dean Joe Harroz

From 1956 to 1961, West practiced law in Ada, Oklahoma. He later returned to OU Law to serve on the faculty until 1962 when he was awarded a Ford Foundation Fellowship at Harvard Law School.

Three years later, in 1965, Gov. Henry Bellmon appointed West district judge of Oklahoma Judicial District 22. West served on the state court until 1973, when President Richard Nixon appointed him as a member of the Civil Aeronautics Board in Washington, D.C., and President Jimmy Carter named him acting chairman in 1977. West left the board in 1978 and returned to private practice in Tulsa, Oklahoma. In 1979, President Carter appointed him to the U.S. District Court for the Western District of Oklahoma, where he has served as a federal trial judge for the past 34 years.

In 2012, West was inducted into the Oklahoma Hall of Fame. Comparing himself to another member of the Oklahoma Hall of Fame, West said, "I choose to think that I am somewhat akin to Will Rogers in that I have never met a man that I didn't like. But unlike Will, I can get over it pretty quick."

However, West turned the joke into a memorable moment of sincerity when he said, "But I have never met a man or woman from this university and this law school that I did not like, and I am unlikely to ever get over that."

First-year law student Robert Brossett presented West with his award. Following his undergraduate studies, Brossett was commissioned as a second lieutenant in the Army Engineering Corps. He served in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom. He is attending law school through the Army's funded legal education program and, upon graduation, he will continue his service as a judge advocate. | **SL** |