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## A Gift from the Heart: The Historic Elkouri Contribution

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# a gift from the heart

## *The Historic Elkouri Contribution*

BY JONELLA FRANK

In 1944 when the young man from Byron, Oklahoma, first climbed the steps of Monnet Hall to begin his studies as a law student, no one could have imagined the impact he would have on generations of students who would follow in his footsteps. After 58 years of service at the University of Oklahoma College of Law, Professor Emeritus Frank Elkouri's impact was more fully understood with the January 2011 announcement of a historic gift of \$6 million given by Frank and his wife, Edna Asper Elkouri. The Elkouri gift, the largest one-time contribution in the history of the College, will support law student scholarship programs.



“The Elkouri gift will provide many students with access to an exceptional legal education and inspire generations of excellence.”

Dean Joe Harroz

Frank’s relationship with the university began seven decades ago. He graduated Phi Beta Kappa from OU in 1943 with a bachelor’s degree in government. He earned his first law degree, an LL.B., from OU in 1947 before his legal studies took him to the University of Michigan, where he was awarded an LL.M. in 1948 and an S.J.D. in 1951. It was a doctoral thesis, written while pursuing the final law degree, that set the course for a long-lasting, highly successful career as a beloved law professor and nationally recognized authority on labor arbitration. His thesis, *How Arbitration Works*, was published in 1952 and is widely regarded as the authoritative treatise on the law and practice of labor arbitration.

He practiced law in Oklahoma City with Quinlan & Elkouri, a firm he co-founded with a classmate. Later, Frank served as an attorney with the National Wage Stabilization Board in Washington, D.C., and Dallas prior to joining the faculty of the OU College of Law in 1952. During his time in Washington, D.C., he met Edna Asper, a freshman at George Washington University Law School.

Prior to law school, Edna, a native Pennsylvanian, had studied dress design at the Art Institute of Pittsburgh, operated a ladies’ and children’s ready-to-wear store in Blairsville, Pennsylvania, and graduated from the University of Pittsburgh with highest honors. She graduated with honors from George Washington University Law School in 1953 and maintained a private law practice before joining the staff of the chief counsel of the Internal Revenue Service in Washington, D.C., where she worked for three years.

After a six-year, long-distance relationship, the couple married in 1956 and established their home in Norman, where Frank had been teaching at the OU College of Law and serving as adviser to the office of the president of the university. Working together, the couple jointly wrote and edited the

second, third and fourth editions of *How Arbitration Works* and conducted research for the fifth edition.

Edna explained that she successfully converted from tax law to labor law in taking on the job of co-author and editor, but because she was the tax expert, Frank decided she should have the “dubious honor” of filing their tax returns. Giving his explanation of this division of labor, Frank said, “Through the years, Edna has handled our finances and tax returns, as well as having made the basic decisions on investments. In other words, she has allowed me more time for my professional activities and definitely deserves much of the credit for whatever I have accomplished professionally.” Their arrangement apparently worked well. In addition to collaborating on the multiple revisions of *How Arbitration Works*, in 1991, the couple wrote *Resolving Drug Issues*, which presented a factual analysis of drug-related employment issues.

In his more than 50 years serving the College of Law, Frank taught labor law, property, trade regulation, torts and workers’ compensation. He was a favorite professor of many law students, known for his keen intellect and gentle, unassuming demeanor. When not in class, many of his hours were devoted to collecting, classifying, analyzing and criticizing published labor arbitration opinions for future publication.

He has written a variety of articles and books on the subjects he taught; however, it is the book *How Arbitration Works*, now in its sixth edition, that played a major role in the creation of guiding principles for labor arbitrators and significantly influenced labor law. In explaining the importance of the book, Darin Fox, director of the law library, explained it has long been considered the leading work in the field of arbitration law and has been cited by hundreds of court decisions (including three U.S. Supreme Court decisions) and by more than a thousand



Frank Elkouri and Edna Asper Elkouri, along with OU President David L. Boren and Dean Joe Harroz, announce their historic gift to the College of Law.

The Elkouris, in the early years of their marriage.

Frank Elkouri and Randy Coyne, the Frank Elkouri and Edna Asper Elkouri Professor of Law, enjoy a faculty reception hosted at the home of Dean and Mrs. Joe Harroz.



“We wanted to do for the students what we couldn’t do for those who helped us.”

Frank Elkouri

law review articles, treatises and legal newspapers.

However, Frank is a multi-faceted individual with talents beyond the classroom and his scholarly pursuits.


Some OU Law graduates also will

remember him as a talented clarinetist who performed in a law faculty combo, delighting students at Gridiron. Years before, as an undergraduate, he had played the clarinet and the saxophone in the OU Dance Band.

Frank also served as an arbitrator in labor-management disputes, a special justice of the Oklahoma Supreme Court, a member of the Oklahoma Governor’s Special Advisory Committee on Workmen’s Compensation and an executive reservist with the U.S. Department of Labor. He is a member of the National Academy of Arbitrators, the American Arbitration Association and the Oklahoma Bar Association.

In 1974, he received the University of Oklahoma Distinguished Teaching Citation and was appointed to a George Lynn Cross Research Professorship in 1979. The American Arbitration Association honored him in 1980 with the Whitney North Seymour Medal for his outstanding contributions to arbitration.

For one semester in 1961, Frank taught two labor law classes as a visiting professor at the University of Michigan where, 10 years prior, he had received his final advanced law degree. In reflecting on his semester as a visiting professor and comparing the legal education experience available at the OU College of Law to that at Michigan Law, considered by many to be a top law school in the nation, he stated, “I discovered that you can do here what you can do there, whatever your inclination is. A student can receive as fine a legal education here as there. It’s all a matter of how you apply yourself.”



The Elkouris' historic gift will provide scholarships for generations of OU law students. They see their gift as a way of paying it forward in recognition of and appreciation for financial assistance they both received when they were in law school. "We wanted to do for the students what we couldn't do for those who helped us," Frank said. "OU is a very high-quality institution. We always planned to give to the law school, so why wait? We decided to make our donation now, so we could enjoy it and observe it."

To honor the couple's long-lasting devotion to OU Law, the hall of professor emeritus offices was officially named the **Frank and Edna Elkouri Emeritus Wing**.

leadership at the College of Law through 2010 as an inspirational mentor and accomplished scholar," said Dean Joe Harroz. To honor the couple's long-lasting devotion to OU Law, the hall of professor emeritus offices was officially named the Frank and Edna Elkouri Emeritus Wing in 2010.

"Professor Elkouri is an outstanding scholar and treasured professor emeritus," Harroz said. "He is a man of great character and his contributions throughout the past five decades of service to the College are innumerable. Now, he and Edna, his partner in life and in dedication to the OU College of Law, leave an indelible mark on the future of the College. The Elkouri gift will provide many students with access to an exceptional legal education and inspire generations of excellence." | **SL** |

This most recent gift is not the first time the College has benefitted from the Elkouris' generosity. In 2002, the couple made another major gift to endow the Frank Elkouri and Edna Asper Elkouri Professorship of Law, which is currently held by Randy Coyne.

Frank retired in 1985, but remained a cherished colleague often seen at the law school. "He continued his



Dean Eugene Kuntz and Professor Frank Elkouri perform at the 1966 Gridiron.

