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Order *of the* Owl

BY JONELLA FRANK AND EVIE HOLZER

Four prominent graduates of the OU College of Law were honored as the inaugural inductees into the Order of the Owl, a hall of fame established by the College to recognize alumni who demonstrate leadership and service through outstanding accomplishments in their legal careers. The induction dinner was held November 8 in the Molly Shi Boren Ballroom in Oklahoma Memorial Union. Alumni honored were Ada Lois Sipuel Fisher ('51), in memoriam, William G. Paul ('56), W. DeVier Pierson ('57) and William J. Ross ('54).

More than 400 enthusiastic guests filled the ballroom and were welcomed by Dean Joe Harroz. He briefly spoke of the common experiences of all OU Law graduates and introduced President David L. Boren, a member of the Class of 1968.

"This evening has the feeling of a family gathering," commented Boren. He spoke of recent student and faculty achievements and stated, "We are honoring role models tonight, and we celebrate that the OU College of Law is truly on the move."

The induction ceremony followed dinner with each award recipient joining Harroz on the stage, accompanied by a student presenter who was selected based on the honoree's own law school experiences. Harroz read comments from friends and family, followed by the award presentation and remarks from the honoree. A tribute video was shown prior to the induction of Ada Lois Sipuel Fisher, whose son, Bruce Fisher, accepted the award on her behalf.

Ada Lois Sipuel Fisher

CLASS OF 1951



- Civil rights pioneer and a trailblazer for generations to follow
- First African American to attend and graduate from the OU College of Law

At the urging of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, 21-year-old Ada Lois Sipuel Fisher applied for admission to the OU law school on January 14, 1946, to challenge

Oklahoma's segregation laws. After reviewing Fisher's application, then-OU President George Lynn Cross advised her that there was no academic reason to reject her application for admission, but Oklahoma statutes prohibited whites and blacks from attending classes together. After a lengthy struggle, led by Thurgood Marshall and requiring two trips to the U.S. Supreme Court, she was admitted to the OU College of Law.

In August 1951, she graduated from the OU College of Law. After practicing law in Chickasha, Fisher joined the faculty of Langston University in 1957, where she served as chair of the Department of Social Sciences. She earned a master's degree in history from OU in 1968. She retired from Langston in December 1987 as assistant vice president for academic affairs.

In 1981, the Smithsonian Institution designated her as one of the 150 outstanding Black Women Who Have Had the Most Impact on the Course of American History. In 1991, OU honored her with an Honorary Doctorate, and in 1992, she was appointed to the OU Board of Regents. After she died in 1995, OU dedicated the Ada Lois Sipuel Fisher Garden on the Norman campus in her honor.

Nathan Williamson, president of the Ada Lois Sipuel Fisher Chapter of the Black Law Students Association, presented the Order of the Owl award to Bruce Fisher, Ada Lois Sipuel Fisher's son, following a video honoring his mother. The Fisher tribute video is posted online at www.law.ou.edu.



Family members of Ada Lois Sipuel Fisher gather around the Order of the Owl award presented posthumously to her.

"She's one of those people who truly embodied that 'Be the change you want to see in the world.' Instead of saying 'I wish' she went and she did it, and I think that speaks the most to me. It's the kind of person I want to be."

– *OU Law Student Bianca Bryant*

"Had it not been for her, my uncle would not have been able to be the second African American admitted to the University of Oklahoma College of Law. Had it not been for her, then he or the third, fourth, fifth and so on would not have been admitted, myself included."

– *OU Law Student Reonna Green*

"She was a pioneer, she was fearless and she was so pretty. She was such a physically beautiful lady, but she was tough. She was committed to making it better for young lawyers, like me."

– *Chief Judge Vicki Miles-LaGrange
U.S. District Court for the Western
District of Oklahoma*

William G. “Bill” Paul

CLASS OF 1956



- President of the American Bar Association from 1999 to 2000
- Serves as of counsel for Crowe & Dunlevy in Oklahoma City

A leader in the bar, Bill Paul has served as president of the Oklahoma County, Oklahoma and American bar associations, the American Bar Endowment, and the National Conference of Bar Presidents, among other organizations. Paul serves as of counsel with Crowe & Dunlevy and specializes in the practice areas of alternative dispute resolution, commercial transactions, corporate governance, and trusts and estates law. Named one of “The Best Lawyers in America for Alternative Dispute Resolution,” he is a recipient of the Oklahoma Bar Association’s President’s Award and Lifetime Achievement Award.

He was inducted into the Oklahoma Hall of Fame in 2003 and is a member of the OU Alumni Hall of Fame. Additionally, he was honored by the American Bar Association’s Commission on Racial and Ethnic Diversity in the Profession with its Spirit of Excellence Award for his commitment to diversity in the legal profession.

Paul’s law school education was interrupted by two years of active duty in the United States Marine Corps, including service in Korea. He re-entered law school as a junior in the fall of 1954, and had the highest grade point average in the class in the first semester after his return.

Sahar Jooshani presented the Order of the Owl award to Paul. Jooshani is a third-year law student who has studied abroad in France and Jordan and speaks five languages. Following graduation, she will serve in the JAG Corps.



Bill Paul receives his award from student presenter Sahar Jooshani.

“Bill Paul and I entered the University of Oklahoma together in 1948. He very quickly established himself as an outstanding student. Shortly thereafter I was standing beside the road in Norman, trying to hitchhike to my hometown in Antlers. Bill picked me up and gave me a lift to Pauls Valley. From that day, we have been close friends — through school, in each other’s wedding, through the Marine Corps in Korea, then moot court partners in law school. I can’t begin to place a value on his friendship through the years. He has been both a friend and an inspiration to me — because he not only gave me a lift on the road, but throughout undergraduate school and law school. He has been my role model as a lawyer and a person in every sense of the word. I am unable to express how truly grateful I am to ‘My Main Man’ William G. Paul.”

– Judge Lee West
U.S. District Court for the Western
District of Oklahoma

DeVier Pierson

CLASS OF 1957



- Co-chair of the OU College of Law Board of Visitors
- Special counsel for Hunton & Williams in Washington, D.C.

DeVier Pierson built a nationally-recognized legal practice during his 30 years in Washington, D.C. His practice focuses on litigation, with concentration on the domestic and international energy fields

and on international arbitration and litigation. He has held prominent positions in the executive and legislative branches of government, including serving as special counsel to President Lyndon B. Johnson and chief counsel to the Joint Committee on the Organization of Congress. He also was a member of the Task Force for the Organization of the Department of Transportation, the Trade Advisory Group of the Council on International Economic Policy, the Carter Energy Task Force, the Advisory Committee to the U.S Trade Representative, and the U.S. Delegation to the El Salvador Legislative Elections.

While at OU Law, Pierson was the managing editor of the *Oklahoma Law Review* and was a member of the team that won the 1956 national championship in the National Moot Court Competition.

Presenting the Order of the Owl award to Pierson was Matt Brown, a third-year law student who is a Calvert Moot Court Competition finalist and articles editor of the *Oklahoma Law Review*.



OU President David Boren visits with Shirley and DeVier Pierson at the induction ceremony.

"Devier is the brightest, most articulate person I know. Early in my deanship, when the law school was in need of much attention, he was the first person to help me see there might be light at the end of the tunnel. His early encouragement and support was a turning point in my deanship and the start of what turned out to be a successful fundraising campaign to renovate and add on to our law school."

– *Dean Emeritus Andy Coats*

"One of DeVier's famous clients was Elliot Abrams, a central figure in the Iran Contra Affair. In his autobiography, Abrams offered a unique view of his lawyer from Oklahoma. Abrams wrote, 'Tall, silver-haired, with the polite and old-fashioned manners and speech of a well-bred Oklahoma lawyer, he is the central casting Western lawyer who talks slowly and quietly, then exits the room leaving everyone feeling satisfied and friendly, and wondering how it is they have all just agreed to give it up and see things his way.'"

– *Biographer Bob Burke*

William J. "Bill" Ross

CLASS OF 1954



- Co-chair of the OU College of Law Board of Visitors
- Chairman of the board of the Inasmuch Foundation and the Ethics and Excellence in Journalism Foundation

Bill Ross is the chairman of the board of directors of both the Inasmuch Foundation and the Ethics and Excellence in Journalism Foundation. The

Inasmuch Foundation is committed to education, health and human services and community and has provided grants totaling \$95 million since 2003. The Ethics and Excellence in Journalism Foundation funds projects in support of student journalists, working journalists and investigative reporting and, since 2003, the foundation has provided grants totaling \$30.5 million. In addition, Ross serves as director of Oklahoma City Educare Inc.

His extensive involvement with OU includes service on the Reach for Excellence Campaign Committee and the OU College of Law Board of Visitors. Along with Co-chair DeVier Pierson, Ross led a successful campaign to expand and renovate the OU Law Center. In 2000, Ross was honored with the Regents' Alumni Award, which honors individuals who have given generously of their time and service to the university.

Thanks to the Inasmuch Foundation, the Donald E. Pray Law Library includes four multimedia study rooms, which accommodate eight students each and are equipped with the latest technology. In the 2010-2011 academic year, 463 individual students made reservations for the Inasmuch Foundation Multimedia Study Rooms. That is 88 percent of the student body. In addition, there were more than 6,900 uses of the rooms.

Jeff Riles, third-year student and president of the Student Bar Association, represents our students' appreciation of this gift and presented the Order of the Owl award to Ross.



Dean Joe Harroz congratulates Bill Ross, whose award was presented by Jeff Riles, Student Bar Association president.

"Dad's firm was one of the oldest in the state. Founded by Dennis T. Flynn in 1902, the firm was general counsel to Santa Fe South Railroad and Oklahoma Gas and Electric. When Gordon Rainey, senior partner, died without warning in 1975, Dad was elevated very quickly to senior partner and was able to keep all of the clients and save the firm. The firm incorporated The Oklahoma Publishing Company in 1903. Dad really enjoyed representing three generations of Gaylords."

– *Bob Ross, Bill Ross's son*

"Edith Gaylord Harper ventured with her visions and family's passions to make this a better world. Few knew her thoughts better than Bill. The two met at least weekly for decades. He was her attorney, advocate, counselor, and especially her friend. Bill continues her legacy as chairman of her two foundations (Ethics in Excellence and Inasmuch), always with the unwritten tag line: What would Edith do?"

– *Tricia Everest, Gaylord family member*