



Arkansas Association of Defense Counsel

July 18th 2016

W.A. ELDREDGE, JR.

OUTSTANDING YOUNG LAWYER AWARD

By Laura Hensley Smith

Mr. Eldredge was born in 1925, graduated from high school in Blytheville, AR, and attended the University of Arkansas at Fayetteville. He was initiated into Kappa Sigma fraternity in 1943, served as the chapter president, received the Distinguished Alumni Award in 1965, and was a lifelong loyal member.

He entered the U.S. Navy in 1944 and returned to the University of Arkansas in 1946 after discharge. He attended law school also at the University and was later selected as an outstanding alumni of the School of Law.

His rise to prominence in the legal community began when he joined the law firm of Mehaffy, Smith and Williams in 1953. The firm, now known as Friday, Eldredge & Clark, grew to become the largest law firm in Arkansas. Mr. Eldredge was a member until his death in 1996.

He was a member of the Pulaski County Bar Association and served as its President from 1965-66, a member of the Arkansas and

American Bar Associations, and a longtime member of the Defense Research Institute. He was very active in the Federation of Insurance and Corporate Counsel (now known as the Federation of Defense and Corporate Counsel) and a Fellow in the American College of Trial Lawyers.

He was best known for representing Missouri Pacific/Union Pacific Railroad and for defending medical care providers in medical malpractice cases. He was honored in 1989 for 35 years of service to the Missouri Pacific/Union Pacific Railroad. He also received the "Sammy" Award from St. Vincent Infirmary in 1971, the Arkansas Hospital Association's Distinguished Service Award in 1988 and the Arkansas Medical Society's Shuffield Award in 1989. He served as a Clinical Professor of Medical Jurisprudence at the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences in Little Rock.

Mr. Eldredge was very active for many years with the March of Dimes. He was Chairman of the City and County Campaigns for the March of Dimes, Chairman of the Pulaski County Chapter of the National March of Dimes, and received many awards from these organizations. He was a

very active member of St. Paul United Methodist Church.

He started defending medical malpractice cases when formal discovery was not needed. Witness lists were exchanged by agreement and documents were provided on request. Depositions were taken, however, and those taken by Bill were used for many years as training tools for the younger attorneys. He is credited by both the plaintiff and defense bar as developing the format used to date by attorneys in defending medical care providers in malpractice cases. His “Blueprint for Justice” closing argument was known by all attorneys who practiced medical malpractice law.

As the late Buddy Sutton was quoted as saying, “he was the perfect partner, probably the most selfless man I have ever known.” The lawyers he trained “were thoroughly prepared and fiercely competitive.”

It was his passion for teaching and training young attorneys which lead to the creation of this award in 1990. Mr. Eldredge went above and beyond in taking the time to mentor young attorneys. Each year he personally held in-house CLE programs taking young lawyers through the handling of a case from the initial assignment through all aspects of a trial. His door was never shut and he spent whatever time was needed to answer questions from young attorneys.

This Award was created by those who loved and respected Bill. Bill’s colleague and dear friend, the late Dennis Shackelford, played a big role in helping to establish the award. Attorneys throughout the state worked to raise the funds to start the award and many medical care providers who had worked with Mr. Eldredge contributed substantial amounts for the funding of the award. Because of Bill’s dedication to the training of young attorneys, it was decided that the monetary part of the award should be used to attend a CLE event. The corpus of the money is held and managed by the Arkansas Bar Foundation.

The criteria for the award was created as a reflection of how Mr. Eldredge lived his professional life – to honor an outstanding young trial attorney who demonstrated exemplary trial conduct, client loyalty and courtesy and candor to opposing counsel. The award was created during Mr. Eldredge’s lifetime to show appreciation to him for his years of service and his commitment to young attorneys. He personally gave the award to the first recipient, Lucinda McDaniel.

Adam Wells is this year’s recipient. Without doubt, Bill would be very pleased. Adam is always “thoroughly prepared” and is “fiercely competitive.” Everyone who has ever had the pleasure of working with Adam would agree that he has

always shown exemplary trial conduct, that he is very loyal to his clients, and that he exhibits complete courtesy and total candor to opposing counsel.

The thanks of the AADC go out to Laura Hensley Smith of the Friday Law Firm for writing this article.



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