

Foundation of Leadership: John S. Selig

11/11/2024

In honor of our firm's 70th anniversary, we are proud to share the stories of our founding leaders – the attorneys who are Mitchell, Williams, Selig, Gates & Woodyard, P.L.L.C. Here, we are sharing the legacy of John S. Selig.

A named partner, distinguished attorney and community leader, John S. Selig has spent years investing in people and giving back to the community. His commitment to client service and community involvement continues within our firm today.

John was born in Chicago and moved to Pine Bluff, Ark. with his family as a young boy. As he stated in the 2004 High Profile feature in the *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette*, at the age of 16 his interest in the law was inadvertently sparked while learning how to drive. John was issued a traffic ticket for running a stop sign in his hometown and had to appear before Judge Lawrence Dawson. Judge Dawson gave him a choice: pay the fine or read the Pine Bluff municipal code and be tested on its contents. John chose the test and he passed. Through this experience, Judge Dawson became one of the most influential people in John's life and set his course for a career in law. Judge Dawson so appreciated this recognition that, on his death, John was asked to serve as a pallbearer at this service.

John graduated from Pine Bluff High School, attended Tulane University in New Orleans and earned an LL.B. from the University of Arkansas School of Law. After law school, John joined the U.S. Army and was on active duty stationed as a first lieutenant, later as captain, at Fort Monmouth, N.J. where he worked in the office of the staff judge advocate. He provided legal assistance to service members and their families. He also served in the divisions of military affairs and military justice. After active service, he served as the staff judge advocate of the 122nd Army Reserve Command and later as commander of the 2nd Military Law Center in New Orleans where he retired as a colonel in the U.S. Army Reserves.

When John left active service, he worked in private practice for the law firm of Chowning, Mitchell, Hamilton & Burrow, later Chowning, Mitchell, Hamilton & Chowning, in Little Rock. He transitioned briefly to working as a trust officer at Worthen Bank. In 1971, John was appointed by then Gov. Dale Bumpers to serve as the Arkansas Securities Commissioner and Savings and Loan Association Supervisor. In 1974, John became vice president and general counsel of First Arkansas Bancstock Corp. The combination of experiences provided John with valuable knowledge in securities regulation and banking law which prepared him once again for private practice.

In 1977, John joined fellow lawyer Dick Williams at his firm which became Williams, Selig & Sayre. Realizing they needed more human capital to grow and build the law practice they wanted, Dick and John merged with Maurice Mitchell's firm on January 1, 1980.

At the existing Mitchell Williams firm, no attorney was practicing in securities law. The merger, along with John's experience, provided him the opportunity to build a securities law practice, work on private offerings and expand his banking legal work. He advised clients on Arkansas and federal securities laws

and assisted clients with taking companies public. As the practice grew, John added talented lawyers to the team. One of the biggest deals John worked on was the sale of a bottling company which was one of the largest private transactions in Arkansas at the time.

John became a leader in the firm. He served as chair of the business practice group and on the firm's board of directors. He was elected as the firm's managing partner in 1993 serving until 1997, and was elected again in 2002 and serving through 2004.

John led the firm's move to the Simmons Tower in 1998. He negotiated leases for the firm's Austin, Rogers and Jonesboro offices. And, he was the leading force behind the creation of the firm's Take Time To Give Program in 2004 which was established in celebration of the firm's 50th Anniversary. It is one of the programs he is most proud of because it truly helps the communities we serve. In honor of John's leadership to create the Take Time to Give program, the firm established the John S. Selig Service Award which is presented annually to the Mitchell Williams employee who contributes the highest number of community service hours to the Take Time To Give program each year.

Throughout his career, John has been an active community leader. He served on the boards of St. Vincent Infirmary, Old State House Museum Associates and Temple B'Nai Israel. He served on the Arkansas Children's Hospital Foundation Council of Regional Advisors. He served on the Arkansas Arts Center (now Arkansas Museum of Fine Art) Board of Directors serving as president and chairman. He continues to serve as president and director of the Ben J. Alzheimer Charitable Foundation Inc. He is also life member of the American Law Institute.

John served as chair of the Arkansas Game and Fish Foundation. He played a major role in acquiring property on Crooked Creek near Yellville. He also donated hours of legal services to the foundation resulting in significant increases in public access to the White River and Crooked Creek. Through these efforts, the foundation was able to build the Fred Berry Conservation Education Center on Crooked Creek. John was also instrumental in the final negotiations for the contribution to build the Potlatch Corp. Conservation Education Center at Cook's Lake. Because of his years of service, John was named to the Arkansas Game and Fish Outdoor Hall of Fame in 2002.

John first became listed in *Best Lawyers*® in 1991. He was named by Best Lawyers as "Corporate Lawyer of the Year" in Little Rock in 2010, "Lawyer of the Year" in securities regulation law in Little Rock in 2012 and "Lawyer of the Year" in securities/capital markets law in Little Rock in 2014. He was named "Boss of the Year" by the Greater Little Rock Legal Support Professionals in 2002. And, the University of Arkansas School of Law has named him an Outstanding Alumnus.

John still emphasizes the principles on which the firm was founded. He said, "The longevity of our law firm is a testament to our guiding principles established 70 years ago that still guide us today: integrity, professionalism and community involvement." In addition, he continues to remind lawyers to "remember to take good care of the staff; not only is it the right thing to do, but they are vital for your success as a lawyer and for the success of the firm."