

A LAWYER'S LAWYER, A PROFESSOR'S PROFESSOR, A DEAN'S DEAN, A WONDERFUL PERSON

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I first met Gary Vause in the mid-seventies when I was a student at Stetson University College of Law. He was Assistant Dean at the time, and the law school was a very different place. For instance, diversity was a four-syllable word with little applicability to our school. Survival of the fittest was the mantra—the old “look to the right and look to the left; only one of you will be present at graduation” sermon. Furthermore, tradition was strong—male students were required to wear ties to class, leaving female students out of place.

Dean Vause represented a breath of fresh air in that sometimes stale environment. As student government secretary, I remember joining President Doug Williamson and the other officers in a meeting imploring Dean Richard Dillon and Dean Vause to lift the men's tie requirement. Dean Dillon was not moved; however, Dean Vause seemed responsive. Not many semesters later, the ties were gone! Dean Vause's willingness and ability to promote harmony in the law school was one of his greatest gifts.

First and foremost Gary Vause was an outstanding lawyer. He was a lawyer's lawyer and a respected authority in international and labor relations law. I remember being proud when he joined the faculty because he was such a well-recognized and respected lawyer. Throughout his tenure, his substantial legal abilities added to his credibility throughout the bar because he had been an in-the-trenches lawyer, even before becoming a law school professor and dean.

Dean Vause also was a professor's professor. In any profession or small community, little time elapses before one's peers sort out the stars from the journeymen. Dean Vause always was a

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star, and everyone recognized that fact! Accordingly, when he became Dean, he already had the respect of his peers. That respect, coupled with the skills he gained as a labor relations negotiator, equipped him to bring harmony where discord might otherwise prevail. Like an adroit conductor, Dean Vause led his professorial colleagues toward harmony, and maximized their talents and skills even in the face of forces and situations that might have elicited cacophony in the hands of one less gifted. Without outstanding professors working together for a united goal of excellence, a law school can never achieve national recognition. Dean Vause encouraged the fine professors already at Stetson, added new stars to the faculty, and created an atmosphere in which legal scholarship and superb teaching could flourish. His efforts planted the academic seeds for Stetson to become a recognized leader in legal education.

Dean Vause was a dean's dean. Really good deans raise a lot of money and inspire academic excellence in their schools, and indeed, Dean Vause was a really good dean who accomplished both of those goals with his characteristic style and charm. A great dean, a "dean's dean," is a visionary who embraces a dream and imbues that dream with life from his own personal strength, sheer hard work, and the force of his will and commitment. That was Dean Vause!

Dean Vause dreamed of a nationally recognized legal institution, and he achieved it. Stetson is the oldest law school in the State of Florida. Notwithstanding its long and distinguished history as a private institution, Stetson confronts significant challenges in the competitive arena of legal academia. Under Dean Vause's leadership, Stetson's dominance in litigation-skills training was nationally acknowledged. I remember, when the son of former Florida Bar President and outstanding litigator Ben Hill enrolled at Stetson, saying, "Congratulations, now the Hill family will have a first-rate trial lawyer!" Indeed, at American Bar Association (ABA) meetings and at almost any bar function at which the subject arises, Stetson is recognized as the benchmark against which trial-practice programs are measured.

Dean Vause also dreamed of creating the first-in-the-nation, evening law school operated from a satellite campus in a neighboring city. He envisioned a fully accredited law school that spanned Tampa Bay and provided access to quality legal education for all of the area's residents and for those who would choose

to move to Tampa Bay for this unique opportunity. Dean Vause's vision was not of a pedestrian office building that housed a few dreary classrooms populated by weary professors and night-time law students, who dragged to school after a full day's work. Instead, Dean Vause conjured a gorgeous Mediterranean-style building, shared by a state appellate court and adjoining a park along the Hillsborough River. This would be a signature facility for the neighborhood, for the court, and for the school.

Of course, Dean Vause's dream culminated into the Tampa Law Center and Campus located in Tampa's urban core, but also in the pastoral surroundings of a park and the Hillsborough River. I had the distinct honor to work with him to shape that dream into a reality. Dean Vause was at his best when he was negotiating a deal, and the Tampa Law Center and Campus was quite a deal! From the outset, Dean Vause and Tampa Mayor Richard Greco had a special compatibility and a shared vision for making Stetson a major enhancement to the historic Tampa Heights community.

The lease Dean Vause negotiated with the Second District Court of Appeal created an unparalleled synergy. The Hillsborough County courts needed the space that had been leased to the Second District. The Legislature had failed to fund the District Court's purchase of land from the City of Tampa, and the need for a site for the Court was becoming critical. In the midst of negotiations with the City for Stetson's acquisition of the Tampa Law Center and Campus site, Dean Vause seized the opportunity to offer the Court a home, which will provide a marvelous enhancement to the Tampa students' law school experiences. The Court could lease a portion of the new law school building. The school's courtroom could be utilized by the Court during the day, and the law school in the evening. The library could also be used by both the Court and the students. Most importantly, Stetson students could study in the shadow of the Court and experience first-hand the workings of the appellate court system, while receiving Stetson's first-class legal education and outstanding trial training.

No major construction project is easy, and the Tampa Law Center and Campus had many challenges. Nonetheless, Dean Vause never wavered. His vision was fixed, and he never lost sight of it. In fall 2003, the Court should begin to operate from Stetson's Tampa Law Center and Campus and, in January 2004, the first classes will be offered. Dean Vause's vision will become

reality. The legacy will be complete and will remain a lasting tribute to his vision, his perseverance, and his leadership.

Finally, Dean Vause was a wonderful person, who enriched my life merely by his acquaintance. From the almost daily conversations we had while negotiating the acquisition of the Tampa Law Center and Campus, I came to appreciate Gary as one can only after having worked closely with a person to achieve a common goal. He was a man of wisdom who was not afraid to seek and to accept counsel from others. A natural leader, Dean Vause thrived at quarterbacking his team toward a well-defined goal. He inspired respect, admiration, and loyalty. The Stetson family, The Florida Bar, and the City of Tampa have been substantially enriched by Gary Vause.