



Senior Gates Honored by American Bar Association

By Christine Cristiano

The American Bar Association gave their highest honor to Bill Gate’s father, attorney William H. Gates for his work in the legal field and his involvement in encouraging attorneys to perform pro bono work for the disadvantaged.



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According to Bill Gates, he remembers his father “getting up early to go do pro bono work.”

Gates acknowledges that “his sense of hard work and integrity and justice had a profound effect on everything I do. He’s been co’chair of the foundation and really set the course for what the foundation does.”

Upon accepting his award, William Gates, honoree, recalls that he spent “a number of years in this hall as a delegate, I am in awe of the men and women who have been honored with this medal before me. ...Oliver Wendell Homes, Thurgood Marshall, Sandra Day O’Connor. ... I take some pride in what I’ve accomplished as a lawyer, but I’m not altogether convinced I belong in this group.”

According to American Bar Association President, Thomas Wells Jr., Williams Gates “is a shining star of the legal profession and a living testament to the power of public service.” Wells noted the success of Gates’ Seattle-based law firm and his expertise in lawyer professional liability sector.

Wells added that “the firm now known as K & L Gates is a top-tier international law firm with 1,800 lawyers practicing

in 33 offices on three continents. Another area where Bill was ahead of his time was his efforts to make the profession more inclusive. While president of the King County Bar Association, he overcame considerable member opposition to the trustees’ efforts to inaugurate and underwrite the minority law student program at the University of Washington Law School.”

Upon receiving his award, Gates told the House that “one thing that sets lawyers apart from other professions is that they take responsibility for the institution in which they work. Yes, we earn a good living. Yes, we do well for our clients. But there is an additional obligation: to serve justice. That is the North Star of our profession. Ours is not the commercial rule that the customer is always right.”

Gates is the founder of the law firm of Preston Gates & Ellis which is now called K & L Gates. Gates’ previous posts included President of King County Bar Association and the Washington Bar Association. He was also a member of the ABA Commission on Public Understanding About the Law and served in American Bar Association House of Delegates for 13 years. Gates retired in 1998 after working for 48 years in the legal profession.

Bill Gates and his sisters attended the House of Delegates meeting in Chicago to see their father receive the award.

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