

# W. THOMAS DILLARD 2002 RECIPIENT OF THE KBA GOVERNOR'S AWARD

by Bill Vines

At the annual meeting on December 13, 2002, W. Thomas Dillard was presented the Governor's Award by the Knoxville Bar Association. The Governor's Award is an annual award given by the Association to a member felt by the Board of Governors to be exemplary both as an attorney and as a community citizen. This award is designated as the highest award of the Association for a practicing attorney. The recipient has no advance knowledge of the receipt of the award and does not even know he/she is being considered for such an award.

Tom Dillard is the Managing partner of Ritchie, Fels & Dillard, PC in Knoxville, Tennessee and developed a passion for the law as a result of an incident which occurred when he was 18 years old. During a snowstorm, some students at the University of Tennessee were throwing snowballs and spinning cars. Tom was an 18-year-old student and was arrested by four police officers several blocks away from the commotion. He was innocent and appeared eight times in court only to have the case postponed. Later the charges were dropped. Tom determined that he would be a lawyer. As a lawyer, Tom was resolute that he would be compassionate. Thereafter, whether defending or prosecuting, Tom has done his best to make sure the system works. He knows that you can be wrongfully accused.

Having graduated from the University of Tennessee College of Law in 1964, he served nine years as an Assistant U.S. Attorney in



*Tom Dillard is presented with the 2002 KBA Governor's Award by Bill Vines. Standing beside Tom is wife, Susan Dillard.*

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the Eastern District of Tennessee. He then became the District's first full-time Federal Magistrate. In 1983, he was appointed by the President of the United States to serve as U.S. Attorney for the Northern Division of Florida. In 1987, he returned to Knoxville and joined the firm of Ritchie, Fels & Dillard, PC.

Tom is certified as a Criminal Trial Specialist by the Tennessee Commission on Continuing Legal Education and is a Fellow of the American College of Trial Lawyers and the Tennessee Bar Foundation. He is a Master of the Bench of the Hamilton Burnett American Inns of Court. He has served on the Board of Directors of the Tennessee Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers, the Knoxville Bar Association, the Knoxville Bar Foundation, and the Federal Defender Services of East Tennessee. Tom is the founding President of the Knoxville Defense Lawyers Association. He was appointed to the Mayor's Commission on Police and was appointed to the Tennessee Bar Association's Committee on Professional Standards.

Tom has been a frequent instructor at the National Institute for Trial Advocacy and an adjunct professor of trial practice at U.T. College of Law. He has lectured at numerous seminars for Bar Associations and other professional organizations.

In presenting the award, Bill Vines stated "Tom has seen the law at its worst and determined thereafter to always do his best. He is accomplishing that goal in an exemplary manner."