

By: Bill Vines
Butler, Vines & Babb



Governors' Award - 2011
Randall E. Nichols

RANDALL E. NICHOLS

KNOX COUNTY DISTRICT ATTORNEY GENERAL

2011 GOVERNORS' AWARD RECIPIENT



Upon selection by the elected officers and Board of Governors of the Knoxville Bar Association, a special award is given to a person considered to be a role model for attorneys. This award is the association's highest award.

This award was presented on December 9, 2011, to Randall "Randy" E. Nichols at the Knoxville Bar Association's annual meeting. Randy stood with his wife, Laura; son, Ross Nichols; daughter LeeAnne Gerrity and husband, Chad; and favorite (but only thus far!) grandchild, Carter. The presenter noted that attorneys properly pursuing each client's case are often pursuing opposing positions. In spite of such opposing positions and regardless of the outcome of the case, respect for the attorney representing the opposing party is often gained. That respect is gained because of the professional manner in which the opposing view was presented. Some attorneys command special respect which results in their peers designating them as role models. The Governors' Award recognizes such attorneys. This award is given in recognition of their service as an attorney and for community service.

Randy Nichols is a 1973 graduate of the University of Tennessee Law School. He practiced for four years as an Assistant District Attorney and for ten years as a criminal defense attorney. From June 1988 until August 1992, he served as Judge of the Knox County Criminal Court. In 1992 he became Knox County Attorney General. He has served as Attorney General longer than any person who has held that position for over 100 years. He will step down in 2014 having announced he will not seek re-election.

Randy has been a respected Judge and Attorney General (under his direction, the average time from arrest to completion of felony cases is less than one year). The Governors' award, however, is not given only for that work. Randy has been an involved member of the community spearheading many programs. He was a founding member of the School Safe Policy Program dealing with truancy. When truancy is reported under this program, parents and students are brought to meetings to determine the reason for the truancy. Thereafter, help to meet the needs of the family is given in an effort to correct the truancy. Parents are required to accept responsibility to ensure their children are in school. The program has reduced truancy for the participants by an astounding 80%!

The problem of domestic violence has been another of Randy's special concerns. He helped start (and served as president) of the Family Justice Center. This program addresses domestic violence and received a U.S. Presidential grant. This program is one of only fifteen in the United States and serves as a model for the entire country. At the District Attorney's office, Randy established the first domestic violence unit in the State of Tennessee.

His work has been beneficial for both new attorneys and the University of Tennessee College of Law. He developed, with professor Neil Cohen, the first "for credit" extern program at the University of Tennessee College of Law. Under this program, six third year law students work twenty hours per week in the Attorney General's office. They handle real cases. They work for an entire semester.

Randy's work has benefited lawyers generally. He served twelve years on the Tennessee Judicial Selection Commission. His service as a member of the Jury Reform Committee of the Tennessee Bar Association resulted in changes regarding the manner of jury selection. He was appointed to serve on the Gender Fairness Committee by the Tennessee Supreme Court. He also served on the Tennessee Second Look Commission which seeks to improve the State's response to child abuse.

Randy has been President of the Tennessee Attorney General's Conference and has testified before the Tennessee Legislature strongly advocating for a prescription drug monitoring system. He has testified many times regarding statutory amendments concerning violent crime.

In his "spare time," he sometimes plays golf, but mostly looks forward to being with his family (did we mention he has a favorite grandson?).

Randy is a role model attorney and is deserving of the Governors' Award.