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## JOHN T. O'CONNOR, II RECIPIENT OF 2013 GOVERNORS' AWARD



On December 13, 2013, the Knoxville Bar Association presented to John T. O'Connor, II its prestigious Governors' Award. The Governors' Award is given annually to an attorney thought by his/her peers as being exemplary, both in terms of service as an attorney and as a community citizen. The recipient is selected following consideration by a special committee. Thereafter, names are submitted to the elected Board of Governors of the Knoxville Bar Association (hence the name, "Governors' Award"). It is an award that is not given for any one achievement, but for the entirety of the recipient's service as an attorney and as a member of the community. It is designated as the highest award of the Knoxville Bar Association.

John O'Connor, II was born in 1935, the first of six children, and the first of 35 grandchildren of John T. O'Connor. John T. O'Connor was Mayor of Knoxville and was greatly admired by the recipient of this Award, John T. O'Connor II. John T. O'Connor, II, graduated from Knoxville Catholic High School where he played basketball and was Secretary of the Senior Class. He then attended The University of Tennessee and following graduation served in the armed forces as an officer.

Thereafter, John attended The University of Tennessee Law School. He would later say that the smartest thing he ever did was to ask an honor student, Betsy, to be his wife. Betsy was truly a legal scholar. She was asked by the Law School to be the Librarian after she graduated. She served in that capacity for many years, stopping only to be a full-time mother. She then returned to be a Librarian at Lawson-McGhee Library in Knoxville. John and Betsy were married in September 1964, and they have three children: John, Matt, and Mary Virginia.

Early in John's practice, he worked as a prosecutor in the Knox County Attorney General's Office. He often remarked that the extensive courtroom experience he received as a result of that position was invaluable. He also taught Business Law at The University of Tennessee on a part-time basis.

John has been described as one of the hardest working lawyers at the Knoxville Bar. It was not unusual to find him at the office on weekends. He is one of those talented persons who was able to balance family and law practice. He concentrated on the things that were most important to him: family, church and law practice.

In 1968, John associated with the firm of Child & Child. (Partner, George Child, had become the Domestic Relations Judge.) Later, the firm became Child & O'Connor. John conducted a varied and truly general practice ("anything that walked in the door!"). Subsequently, he developed a very respected domestic relations practice which was the emphasis of his legal expertise until his retirement in 2010.

Interviews with some of the attorneys who practiced in the domestic relations area reveal that John had a "firm, but reasonable" approach to the problems encountered in domestic relations work and was a problem-solver. The clients loved him. He was respected not only by opposing counsel, but also by the Judges.

John was active in the Knoxville Bar Association, serving in various capacities and as President of the Knoxville Bar Association in 1984. While that office is today significantly staffed, John and his secretary essentially ran the Bar Association out of John's law office. He is a member of the Knoxville Bar Foundation and the Tennessee Bar Foundation.

John was and is very active in the community. His church has been most important to him. He was appointed Diocesan Attorney for the Knoxville Diocese in 1988 and served in that capacity until his retirement. For a time, he served as Eucharistic Minister. He was the first recipient of the Immaculata Award given to him in 2010. John was one of only a few persons in the Diocese to receive Papal Honors.

John has been and is highly respected and has now received the highest award of the Knoxville Bar Association.