



### **George B. Mast**

George B. Mast was born in Watauga County on October 6, 1936. The son of Dave and Grace Mast, he grew up on Mast Gap Road, between the communities of Sugar Grove and Valle Crucis, on land that has been in the family since 1778. His parents began their careers as educators and later raised George and his three brothers on the farm, where he learned the value of hard work at an early age.

When he wasn't occupied with his daily chores – from milking cows and feeding livestock to putting up hay and corn and picking berries – George devoted his attention to church, school and athletics. He was an all-star basketball player at Cove Creek High School on teams that dominated the hardwood of Avery, Ashe and Watauga counties without losing a regular season game during his junior and senior years.

George headed east to begin his college education on the original campus of Wake Forest College and moved with the school, now known as Wake Forest University, when it relocated to Winston-Salem in 1956. He entered what was known as the three-and-three career program, earning his bachelor's degree in 1958 and law degree in 1960. George remembers fondly the influence of Dean Carroll W. Weathers and law professors Robert E. Lee, James Sizemore, James A. Webster, and Norman Adrian Wiggins, who shaped his understanding of the law and guided him on his path to practice law. George's devotion to his alma mater has been underscored through the establishment of the Carroll W. Weathers Scholarship at Wake Forest University School of Law and the George B. Mast Jr. Memorial Scholarship at Wake Forest University.

Following graduation from law school, George entered the U.S. Army as an attorney in the Judge Advocate General's Corps. After attending the Judge Advocate General's School in Charlottesville, Virginia, at the University of Virginia, George served at Fort Bragg and Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri, where he did extensive trial work in general courts-martial. He completed his tour of duty with the U.S. Army with the rank of captain in October 1962.

Having had extensive trial experience while in the military service, George entered the practice of law with Robert A. Spence in 1962 in Smithfield. As a young lawyer practicing in a small town in the 1960s, he took on all types of work, representing clients in criminal matters, estate planning, real estate transactions, and all types of litigation. The firm, now known as Mast Law Firm, expanded over the years and flourished as Mast, Tew, Armstrong & Morris, P.A., Mast, Morris, Schulz & Mast, P.A., and later as Mast, Schulz, Mast, Mills, Stem & Johnson, P.A.

Throughout every iteration of the firm, George has served as a mentor to aspiring young lawyers and instilled in them the importance of professionalism and service. "Always call or email folks back the same day," he would often say to new attorneys. "They may be a difficult client or a difficult person with a new matter, but as long as you have contact with them, they may bring you that very big case. If you don't call them back, they may go elsewhere."

On countless occasions when George would read or hear about the accomplishments of a client's child, he made a point to send a personal, hand-written note to the parents. "Care about your clients and their children," George would say. "And always thank people for the business they have brought you, and for their friendship."

George's stature as a mentor and leader carried over into his involvement in the North Carolina Bar Association, culminating with his service as president of the NCBA in 1990-91. George chaired the NCBA Litigation Section in 1984-85 and served on the NCBA Board of Governors in 1985-88. He is also a past chair of the Memorials Committee and the Judicial Selection Advisory Committee, and has provided countless hours of pro bono service through Legal Services (now Legal Aid) of North Carolina, the NCBA and the North Carolina Bar Foundation. He was inducted into the NCBA General Practice (now Legal Practice) Hall of Fame in 2007.

Upon his installation as the 96th president of the NCBA, George expressed his desire to help make the 1990s a "decade of giving." Lawyers, he continued, "need to recommit ourselves to the unselfish giving of ourselves to our families, friends, clients and humanity, without regard to the timesheet or financial reward. Service to humanity is the best work of life."

Service has certainly been an ongoing commitment of George Mast's life. George has served as president of the Smithfield Chamber of Commerce and the Johnston County Bar, as a trustee of Wake Forest University and N.C. Baptist Retirement Homes, and as chair of the Department of Social Services. He served 16 years as a deacon for First Baptist Church of Smithfield, and founded a local bank, Peoples National Bank, which later merged with BB&T.

George and his wife, Gayle Fitz, have a blended family of five children – Charles, Anna Leigh, Rebecca, Leah and Christa – including two who are attorneys. Charles practices with the Mast Firm and Christa is an assistant district attorney in New Hanover County. They also have nine grandchildren and one great-grandson, and enjoy spending time with family and friends in Smithfield, Wrightsville Beach, or the mountains.