

## Comer and Smith receive distinguished service awards



Mary and John (LL.B.'49) Comer pose with John's Distinguished Service Scroll Award, honoring his selfless dedication to the legal profession.

In June, the Law School Association presented its highest honor, the Distinguished Service Scroll Award, to attorney John D. Comer (LL.B.'49) and Georgia Court of Appeals Judge J.D. Smith (J.D.'71).

Given annually, the award goes to worthy individuals whose selfless dedication to the legal profession and the School of Law merits special recognition. The awards are presented during the LSA's annual breakfast held in conjunction with the State Bar of Georgia's Annual Meeting.

Fellow law partner and Georgia Law alumnus Tilman E. Self III (J.D.'97) presented Comer with his award. Self described Comer as a well-rounded individual dedicated to his family, community and profession. He said the award was "tailor-made for somebody like John Comer" who has "demonstrated on a daily basis how a person should live [his] life and conduct [himself] as a lawyer."

Upon receiving the award, Comer said he was "deeply honored" and would change only one thing in respect to his ties to the legal profession – being more active in the law school's alumni association.

Comer was born in Macon, but attended Middlesex preparatory school in Concord, Mass. Upon his graduation in 1941, Comer spent the next 42 months serving in the U.S. Army as a first lieutenant in Field Artillery (Pacific Theatre). After the war, he earned his bachelor's degree at Harvard College and his law degree *cum laude* at UGA, where he graduated first in his class in 1949. While at the university, he was a member of Phi Beta Kappa, Phi Kappa Phi and Gridiron, and served as editor-in-chief of the student editorial board (which would later publish the *Georgia Law Review*).

After law school, Comer returned to Macon to practice as an associate with the firm Turpin & Lane. He later associated with Harris, Harris, Russell & Weaver and became a partner at Harris, Russell, Weaver & Watkins. Comer formed the law firm Sell & Comer in 1956 with fellow Georgia Law alumnus Edward S. Sell Jr. (J.D.'39)

and, in 1980, partnered with Melton, McKenna, House & Green to form Sell & Melton. He became of counsel at Sell & Melton in 2002, a position he still holds today.

Comer has held multiple leadership positions within the legal profession and has served as president of the Macon Bar Association, the Macon Legal Aid Society and the Georgia Academy of Hospital Attorneys. In addition, he has been a recipient of the Macon Bar Association's Lawyer of the Year Award and has earned a listing in *The Best Lawyers in America*.

Comer and his wife, Mary, have a son and daughter as well as two grandchildren.

Carter Chair Emeritus R. Perry Sentell Jr. (LL.B.'58) presented Smith with his award. Sentell called Smith a "paragon of character and integrity," Sentell said, as evidenced by their nominations, Smith's colleagues also hold him in high esteem, regarding him as "the kindest, most thoughtful [and] most helpful judge on the bench."

After receiving the Distinguished Service Scroll Award, Smith acknowledged Sentell as one of the most inspirational people in his life, stating that "having this award presented to me by Professor Sentell is as much of an honor as the award itself." He also reminded alumni of the great value of their associations with the law school and the friendships they formed there.

Born in Hall County, Smith was educated in the county's school system at both the primary and secondary levels. He graduated with honors from the University of Florida in 1968, earning his Bachelor of Arts in Economics. Then, he obtained his Juris Doctor from UGA in 1972. While at Georgia, Smith served as associate editor of the *Georgia Law Review* and was named to the Dean's List.

Following law school, he served as a law assistant to Justice William B. Gunter of the Supreme Court of Georgia before beginning private law practice. While practicing law, Smith earned a Master of Laws in Taxation from Emory University. While serving



Pictured with Distinguished Service Scroll recipient J.D. Smith (J.D.'71) (center) are (l. to r.) son Brian (J.D.'04), award presenter Carter Chair Emeritus Perry Sentell (LL.B.'58), wife Flo and daughter Joanna, who is a second-year student at Georgia Law.

as an appellate judge, he earned a Master of Laws in Judicial Process from the University of Virginia.

Gov. Zell Miller appointed Smith to the Georgia Court of Appeals in 1993. Smith currently serves as a presiding judge and is the court's immediate past chief judge. Previously, he was a Superior Court judge for over eight years and served as chief judge of the Northeastern Judicial Circuit.

Smith is a member and past president of the Gainesville-

Northeastern Circuit Bar Association and a member of the Atlanta Bar Association, the State Bar of Georgia and the American Bar Association. He currently serves as president of Georgia Law's Joseph Henry Lumpkin American Inn of Court and is chair of the law school's Board of Visitors.

He and his wife Flo have two adult children, Brian and Joanna. Brian is a 2004 graduate of Georgia Law, and Joanna is a second-year law student at UGA.

### State Bar of Georgia Annual Meeting Alumni Events

At the State Bar of Georgia Annual Meeting alumni reception, held at Inglesby, Falligant, Horne, Courington & Chisholm, are 2004 classmates (l. to r.) Stan Baker, Sally Gordon Haskell, Benjamin Perkins, Susannah Rogers Pedigo and Jason Pedigo.



Emory Palmer (J.D.'99) (left), Jennifer Palmer (J.D.'99) and Joshua Walker (J.D.'99) pose for a photo.

Class of 1980 alumni Eleanor Banister (also LSA president-elect), Mark Worsham and Mary Katharyn Higginbotham found time to reconnect.



Attending the State Bar of Georgia Annual Meeting breakfast were: (standing, l. to r.) LSA President Robert Freeman (J.D.'72), Dean Emeritus Ralph Beaird, George Mundy (J.D.'72), Paul Kilpatrick (LL.B.'65), Tommy Burnside (LL.B.'62), Alex Crumbley (J.D.'66), (sitting, l. to r.) John Pridgen (J.D.'75), Bobby Chasteen (J.D.'69) and Marion Pope (LL.B.'53).