

Raising the Bar

When beloved Trinity history professor Don Everett died in 2004, he left a shining legacy of scholarship, mentorship, and service to the University that spanned almost 40 years. As faculty sponsor and honorary member of the Triniteer fraternity for many years, Everett relished the opportunity to guide countless young men who were navigating that poignant nexus between college and career.

More often than not they were bright young students like Michael Burton '85, who graduated with a degree in history and no more than an inkling that he might want to pursue a career in law.

"I was interested in doing something that gave me an idea of what went on in a law firm," Burton says. Everett was interested in helping students find their way, so he phoned his former student David Prichard '75, who wasn't too far into his own law career, with an idea.

"He said, 'You work for a good size firm. Frequently, I have top flight students who think they may be interested in going to law school, but want to find out if that's something they want to do before embarking on a profession that's very demanding,'" Prichard remembers. Could Prichard, then an attorney at the San Antonio firm of Groce, Locke & Hebdon (GL&H), accommodate these students?

He could, and he did. For five years former Everett students of a certain type--bright, searching, hard-working students--spent from six months to a year in a job that functioned as an informal pre-law internship.

"I remember that my official title was messenger," Burton recalls with amusement. "We [the messengers] got paid more the farther our jobs took us, so we tried to get errands that were far away." Besides delivering court documents, Burton spent some time sizing up the people in the profession around him, and he liked what he saw. Burton's humble career beginnings led to his attending the University of Texas Law School and founding his own firm, Burton & Davis LLP, in Milwaukee.

Eventually, the job became known as "the assistant to the legal assistant" program, says Barbara Johnson, Prichard's long-time legal assistant. Johnson supervised the work of most of these Trinity alumni, "We kept them busy," she says.

For Charles Eskridge '85, the program provided a kind of safety net after an abrupt entry and just as abrupt exit from law school in the fall after his graduation.

"I started UT Law and decided right away that I wanted to take a look at the practice of law before devoting three years to getting into it," Eskridge says. The program was of particular benefit to students who had no knowledge or experience gleaned from family members of the legal profession. He stayed for close to a year and ended up applying (and graduating valedictorian) from Pepperdine Law School, after which he clerked at the United States Supreme Court for Justice Byron White. He's now a partner at Susman Godfrey in Houston.

This was the case with Grant McFarland '87, who is now a full partner in Prichard, Hawkins, McFarland and Young, the firm David started in 1991. Not only did McFarland not come from a family of lawyers, growing up he "didn't know any lawyers."

A history major, McFarland did know that he appreciated a good argument. McFarland's "internship" was particularly rich in opportunity--he talked to accident witnesses, summarized depositions and did basic research, under the supervision of Johnson.

A highlight of his year was attending a trial in El Paso ("my first out-of-town business trip"), an experience that served him well once he got to law school. "For a 22 year-old new graduate, it was kind of fun getting to live that existence," he said.

Two of the program's alumni have thriving careers on the West Coast. Trinity tennis All-American David Egdes '86 attended the University of Houston Law Center before practicing law in Los Angeles. He's now a senior vice president for the Tennis Channel.

Thom Peters '88, who like Egdes is based in Santa Monica, works at a firm that handles major catastrophic injury, wrongful death, and consumer class actions. While working on a trial at GL&H, he learned an important lesson.

Although the details of the case are fuzzy, he remembers that "David and Jeff [Hawkins, of Prichard, Hawkins, McFarland & Young] ran over the plaintiffs attorney. I learned how important it is to be very prepared. My sympathies were with the plaintiffs, and they still are."

Peters' career has included some high profile clients, including attorney Johnnie Cochran, NHL all-star Chris Pronger, the family of attorney Robert Shapiro, NBA player Elden Campbell, and jazz legend Charlie Haden.

In 1990, about the time Prichard was leaving GL&H to form his own firm and Professor Everett retired from Trinity, the "assistant to the legal assistant program" came to a close. But Prichard maintained his ties to Trinity and the Triniteers. Diamond Garza '00 and a former Triniteer is the most recent Trinity addition to the firm.

Of his relationship with the Triniteers, Everett once said, "It has been rewarding to have lived long enough to have seen so many success stories." These former students are grateful for what Don Everett saw in them.