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Living Legends of the Macon Bar

The Bootle Inn of Court in Macon presented a series of programs titled, “Living Legends of the Macon Bar,” which told the stories of Manley F. Brown, Hon. Lamar W. Sizemore Jr. and Virgil L. Adams.

BY TATE CRYMES AND SIENA BERRIOS GADDY



One of the best ways to learn professionalism is to hear about the lives and careers of distinguished lawyers and judges. In that spirit, the Bootle Inn of Court in Macon presented a series of programs titled, “Living Legends of the Macon Bar.” The programs told the stories of Manley Brown, Hon. Lamar Sizemore and Virgil Adams. These are Macon’s “Living Legends.”

Manley F. Brown

Manley Brown¹ was born into humble but loving circumstances in the mountain community of Sols Creek, North Carolina. His mother was the only formally educated person in Sols Creek and, because of her influence, Brown learned to read at age five. He attended Western Carolina University but, after three years, was running out of money. He learned that Mercer University School of Law would admit him without an undergraduate degree. Brown enrolled at Mercer, hoping that he would do well enough that he might find a way to stay.

Manley F. Brown

PHOTO COURTESY OF O'NEAL & BROWN, P.C.

Brown did well but still found himself without enough money to continue. After Brown missed one quarter, Dean Jim Quarles offered Brown a scholarship to return. Brown accepted and graduated with the class of 1964.

Brown then clerked for Hon. William A. Bootle on the federal district court in Macon. After his clerkship, Brown became an assistant U.S. attorney, where he tried more than 75 cases. Brown speaks of the importance of that experience by comparing it to his time as a high school basketball star: in lawyering—like in basketball—“you can’t learn ... from sitting on the bench.”

Brown then entered private practice in Macon with legendary trial lawyer Hank O’Neal. O’Neal and Brown worked together for 15 years until O’Neal passed away. Brown attributes much of his success to lessons he learned from O’Neal. Until Brown retired, he kept O’Neal’s name first in the name of his law firm.

Over more than 40 years of private practice, Brown established a reputation as a superb attorney. In 1985, he was inducted into the American College of Trial Lawyers. Brown became a mentor to generations of trial lawyers and, as an adjunct professor of law at Mercer for 44 years, to law students.

Hon. Lamar W. Sizemore Jr.

Hon. Lamar Sizemore² likes to say that he has had three careers: trial lawyer, judge and mediator. Along the way, he has also served as an adjunct professor and a mentor.

Sizemore learned how to be a lawyer from, among others, his father, Hank



Hon. Lamar W. Sizemore Jr.

PHOTO COURTESY OF CLARK, SMITH & SIZEMORE LLC

O’Neal and Manley Brown. He urges lawyers to treat each prospective client with empathy, explaining that while attorneys see many cases, to the plaintiff, “it is [their] only case, and generally ... [their] only involvement with the legal system.”³ Sizemore’s relationships with his clients were particularly rewarding. They were grateful for his time and expertise and sometimes sent tokens of their appreciation long after the representation ended—such as the client who delivered a bushel of sweet potatoes every Thanksgiving.

Sizemore served for 10 years as a Superior Court judge in Macon. He often shares his three rules with new judges: (1) “just rule,” because the parties cannot proceed until you do; (2) remember you

were a lawyer first, because otherwise you become a tyrant; and (3) when it is possible, err on the side of mercy. He is now of counsel at Clark, Smith & Sizemore in Macon, where he practices with his son, Rick. Sizemore concentrates now on serving as a mediator. He has often said that the best part about being a mediator or a judge is helping lawyers resolve their cases.

Sizemore recognizes his debt to those who mentored him and repays it by mentoring younger lawyers and, as a long-time adjunct professor at Mercer, law students as well. He explains, “[w]e all stand ... on the shoulders of the people who came before [us]. Well, every lawyer practicing law does that, and I think we have an obligation to return that or pay it forward.”⁴



It's a great idea to join
a State Bar Section.

Virgil L. Adams

Virgil Adams⁵ is a founding partner of the firm now known as Adams, Jordan & Herrington in Macon. Adams was raised in modest circumstances but enjoyed the support of his mother and his grandmother, who emphasized the importance of education. Adams took that lesson to heart and graduated from Albany State University, after which he enrolled at Mercer University School of Law. There he discovered he was drawn to the courtroom.

Adams spent the first seven and a half years of his career as an assistant district attorney in Macon, where he tried all kinds of cases, from shoplifting to murder. Adams gained a reputation as an outstanding trial lawyer and was known especially for delivering powerful closing arguments. For example, Adams tried a death penalty case against a man who beat the victim to death with a baseball bat. In his closing argument, Adams smacked a pointer with such impact on counsel table that it shattered. In the appeal, the defendant argued that the closing argument unfairly prejudiced him, but the Supreme Court held, "Bombastic argument is not unconstitutional."⁶

After his years in the DA's office, Adams co-founded his firm, originally known as Mathis, Sands, Jordan & Adams, PC. The firm has recovered millions for their clients and counts among its former partners two federal judges, Hon. W. Louis Sands and Hon. Marc T. Treadwell.

The State Bar of Georgia's 51 sections provide newsletters, programs and the chance to exchange ideas with other practitioners. Section dues are very affordable, from \$10-35. Join one (or more) today by visiting www.gabar.org > Our Programs > Sections. Questions? Contact Sections Director Mary Jo Sullivan at maryjos@gabar.org.



He continues to demonstrate his flair for closing arguments. In a recent case, Adams prevailed after describing to the jury in a medical malpractice case how one document was the “stealth bomber” that would decide the case.

Adams attributes his success to his mentors, Sands, Hon. Walker P. Johnson and Manley Brown, and to his experience as an ADA. Adams reminds lawyers that reputation is paramount and suggests that they become involved in their local communities because “people in the community need to see that you care about them.”

We hope these stories inspire lawyers to lead similar lives of professionalism and honorable service. ●



Virgil L. Adams

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Tate Crymes serves as term clerk for Hon. Austin E. Carter, U.S. Bankruptcy Court for the Middle District of Georgia.

Crymes graduated *cum laude* from Mercer University Walter F. George School of Law and earned her Bachelor of Science in public policy with highest honors from the Georgia Institute of Technology.



Siena Berrios Gaddy serves as career law clerk to Hon. Austin E. Carter, U.S. Bankruptcy Court for the Middle District of Georgia

and is an adjunct professor at Mercer University School of Law. She teaches

Advanced Legal Writing in the Legal Writing, Research, and Drafting Certificate Program and has taught Bar Preparation. Gaddy is the secretary/treasurer of the William A. Bootle American Inn of Court. She graduated magna cum laude from Mercer University Walter F. George School of Law and earned an undergraduate degree in psychology from Saint Leo University.

Endnotes

1. To read the details of Manley Brown’s life, see *An Oral History of Manley F. Brown*, 26 J.S. Legal Hist. 7 (2018).
2. For more of Sizemore’s story, listen to several recorded interviews with him on the website of the Mercer Center

for Legal Ethics and Professionalism, <https://law.mercer.edu/academics/centers/clep/inside-legal-profession/>. See also the transcribed interview in Patrick E. Longan, *Inside the Legal Profession: Conversations with Leaders of the Georgia Bench and Bar 260 – 282* (Mercer University Press 2023).

3. *Inside the Legal Profession*, *supra* note 2 at 261 (Mercer University Press 2023).
4. *Id.* at 266 – 267.
5. You can hear Adams talk about his own career in an interview he gave as part of Mercer Law’s 1L class on professionalism. The recording is available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LKpRfOn0DpM>.
6. *Patillo v. State*, 258 Ga. 255, 262, 368 S.E.2d 493, 498 (1988).