

# Wilbur "Woody" D. Preston Jr. '49

## Distinguished Graduate Award



PATRICIA YOUNG

From the dashed dreams of becoming a professional baseball player to a law firm who declares he epitomizes the heart and soul of its business culture, Wilbur D. Preston Jr. is appropriately honored as this year's recipient of the Distinguished Graduate Award.

As chairman of the firm Whiteford Taylor & Preston, his humility shines forth as strongly as his wit when he exclaims, in reference to his title, "That's what they say, whatever that means." His career is long and spans a number of highly publicized cases. He has enjoyed a successful practice since joining then-named Due, Nickerson

& Whiteford in 1951. Or was it 1950? "Oh, nobody knows, certainly I don't," laughs Preston.

This lightheartedness is infectious. And in stark contrast to the seriousness of some of the most important cases in which he's been involved. But never mind the exact dates, they just aren't that important. What is important are the details and the outcomes—most of which were in Preston's favor.

Sometime in the late 1970s, early 1980s, Preston served as counsel in the successful antitrust case, in which he represented all national construction companies opposing the International Brothers of Electrical Workers and the National Electrical Contractor's Association. At approximately

the same time, Preston served as lead counsel in the First American Mortgage Co. litigation. "This was the trial that helped put Hutton out of business," explains Preston, as E.F. Hutton sustained a tremendous monetary loss against the firm, then-named, Ernst & Whinney.

Timelines become more accurate when he discusses his role in Maryland's savings and loan debacle. In 1985, the state legislature passed a bill appointing Preston as special counsel to the state of Maryland to investigate the savings and loan crisis. Preston and four other officers from the firm spent one year investigating and recommending prosecution of criminal actions and instituting successful civil actions





# WHITEFORD, TAYLOR & PRESTON

year role as chairman of the board of his alma mater. He was president of the Bar Association of Baltimore City and the Maryland State Bar Association, and as such, in 1975, he was instrumental in founding the Maryland Institute for Continuing Professional Education for Lawyers (MICPEL).

What Preston finds most rewarding is his “insignificant contribution to helping minorities achieve success.” He humbly explains that Whiteford Taylor & Preston was the first firm to hire African-American attorneys as associates and mentor them through to positions as “meaningful partners.”

He founded the Equal Justice Committee that funds the Legal Aid Bureau, and as committee chair helped raise money for erecting the first legal aid building—the Charles Dorsey Building. He earned Order of the Coif after graduating from law

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against the responsible parties.

When the national savings and loan crisis occurred, Preston was hired as counsel to the National Commission on Financial Institution Reform, Recovery and Enforcement. For approximately a year and a half, from 1990 to 1991, Preston served the Congress and the president of the United States and issued a report recommending appropriate changes, “none of which were adopted as the entire institution folded,” notes Preston.

When reflecting upon his career, Preston admits that law was not his first career choice, rather it was a bit of an accident. After realizing that his athletic potential didn’t quite match his love for baseball and

dream of becoming a pro athlete, and while Preston was in the Army of Occupation in Japan, his wife enrolled him in law school.

He began his law school career in 1946 and by mid-term did not have a sense of how he fared. His professor chose to read aloud to the class some examples of correct answers from the only two A papers. When Preston heard the answer he thought to himself, “He’s reading my song.”

From that point, his law career was cemented.

A native Baltimorean, Preston attended Baltimore City public schools and entered Western Maryland College on a full state scholarship. Among his numerous accomplishments, he is proud to highlight his 12-

school and was awarded an honorary doctor of humane letters from Western Maryland College.

Thurman Zollicoffer ’88 Baltimore’s city solicitor and the presenter of the Distinguished Graduate Award to Preston notes, “Woody is the living personification of the credo and spirit of [Whiteford, Taylor & Preston]—excellent representation, professional demeanor and civic responsibility.”

An avid golfer and one who loves water, Preston divides his time between homes in Baltimore and Florida. His four sons from his first marriage (his wife died in 1989) reside in the Baltimore metropolitan area. He and his second wife, Lucy, are enjoying semiretirement.