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Banner & Witcoff Remembers Founding Member, Donald W. Banner



January, 30, 2006 - Donald W. Banner, former U.S. Commissioner of Patents and Trademarks and named Partner in the law firm of Banner & Witcoff, Ltd., died at his home in Tucson, AZ, Sunday, January 29. Don was 81. At the time of his death he was surrounded by those he loved.

Don was a P-47 fighter pilot in World War II. He survived being shot down and was a prisoner of war until liberated by General Patton's 14th Armored Division of the Third Army on April 29, 1945, a day Don celebrated every year since. He received an Electrical Engineering degree from Purdue University and went on to receive his law degree from the University of Detroit. Thereafter Don returned to his hometown of Chicago, where he worked and continued his education, receiving a Master of Patent Laws degree from the John Marshall Law School. From 1953 to 1979 he was General Patent Counsel for Borg-Warner Corporation.

Don was a leader in the field of patent law. During his time at Borg-Warner he was Chair of the American Bar Association Section of Intellectual Property Law, President of the American Intellectual Property Law Association, a founding member of the Association of Corporate Patent Counsel, President of the International Patent and Trademark Association, Co-founder and President of the Intellectual Property Owners Association, and Director of the John Marshall Law School Center for Intellectual Property Law. He was also a United States delegate to numerous international diplomatic conferences.

Because of his many accomplishments and the respect he garnered in the field of intellectual property, Mr. Banner was appointed to be U.S. Commissioner of Patents and Trademarks by both Presidents Nixon and Carter, the only person to be so appointed by presidents of both political parties. He served in that office only during the Carter Administration.

After serving as Commissioner, Don began private practice in Washington D.C., with the firm that bears his name and continued his active schedule.

Those in the intellectual property law field are familiar with Don's legacy of accomplishments and recognitions for those accomplishments. He spoke and published widely on the patent law and its importance to encouraging creativity and promoting the general welfare of our country. During his time in Washington he was Chairman of The Foundation for a Creative America, Co-founder and President of the Giles S. Rich American Inn of Courts, and head of the Intellectual Property program at George Washington Law School.

Among his many lifetime awards are the Jefferson Medal for Outstanding Contributions in the field of Patent, Trademark and Copyright Law and The Distinguished Engineering Alumnus Award from Purdue University. He was the first American to receive the Pacific Industrial Property Association Award for Outstanding Contributions in the Intellectual Property Field. Most recently Don received the Lifetime Achievement Award from The Sedona Conference for his dedication to the practice of intellectual property law and the Lifetime Achievement Award from the National Inventors Hall of Fame.

Don was preceded in death by his first wife, Ruth, and he is survived by his wife of twenty years, Jean. Don is also survived by his five children: daughters Peggy (Mrs. James) Dau of Bartlesville, OK and Pamela (Mrs. Robert) Banner Krupka of Los Angeles, CA, and sons Donald J. (Helen) of Pueblo, CO, Brian E. (Cathleen) of Washington, DC and Mark T. (Kathie German) of Warrenville, IL. He is also survived by Jean's daughters, each of whom he considered his own, Nancy (Mrs. Robert) Phipps of Nashville, TN, Helen (Mrs. George) Smith of Atlanta, GA and Louise (Mrs. Robert) Whitaker of Franklin, TN and by seventeen grandchildren and twelve great grandchildren. Don is also survived by his sister Irene Buethe, of Wheaton, IL.

A memorial was held at St. Philip's in The Hills in Tucson, AZ. Internment will be at Arlington National Cemetery in Arlington, VA, on April 19, 2006 at 10:00am and will be followed by a memorial service at St. Alban's Episcopal Church (3001 Wisconsin Ave., NW) in Washington, D.C. at 11:30am with a reception immediately following in the parish hall.

The family requests that memorials be made to the following: St. Philip's in the Hills Altar Guild, P.O. Box 65840, Tucson, AZ 85728; Donald W. Banner Scholarship Fund, John Marshall Law School, 315 S. Plymouth Court, Chicago, IL 60604; or to The National Inventor's Hall of Fame, 221 South Broadway, Akron, OH 44308-1505.

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