



**ALEXANDER B.
MCMURTRIE JR. (L'61)**

BY ANN W. PARKS

Like many who graduated before and after him, Alexander B. McMurtrie Jr. (L'61) could not have attended law school without working a full-time job. In the late 1950s, the newly married student would commute from his apartment in Arlington to the Department of Labor, where the administration of the Davis-Bacon Act would occupy his days. Evening classes at Georgetown Law followed, topped off by a nice dinner his wife prepared and study until midnight. The next day, he would get up and do it all again. Although he eventually transferred into day classes, he continued to work throughout law school as a clerk at the firm of Covington & Burling. "It was a grind," he says. "You just had to put your nose to the grindstone and get it done."

Working through law school never hurt anyone, McMurtrie says. Still, nearly 50 years after those late-night study sessions, he wanted to give something back to other Georgetown Law students who now face financial constraints. To that end, McMurtrie and his wife, Margaret "Kitchie" Hillenbrand McMurtrie, recently donated a six-figure gift to the school to establish a new endowed scholarship fund.

A graduate of the University of Notre Dame as well as Georgetown Law, McMurtrie wanted to see the scholarship go to deserving students from both his alma maters. "I've always been interested in scholarship help for needy students who have the ability but not the financial means to achieve their dreams," McMurtrie says. "I suggested to the dean that the scholarships be used for financially strapped Notre Dame graduates who had the ability but maybe not the financial wherewithal to pursue a law degree."

McMurtrie was born in Richmond, Virginia, to middle-class parents who understood the value of education. His father, Alexander B. McMurtrie Sr., was a businessman who died when young McMurtrie was 15. His mother, Mary O'Haren McMurtrie, was a teacher who did graduate work at Columbia University in the 1920s, when few women were pursuing advanced degrees. After attending college at Notre Dame, McMurtrie enrolled in night classes at Georgetown Law — which just seemed like the right thing to do, he said.

And though he did have to work in order to attend school, he received personal and financial help from his family: his mother; his wife and her parents, George C. and Margaret "Peg" Moran Hillenbrand. He also received emotional support from his two brothers, Bill McMurtrie (L'64) and the late Monsignor James W. McMurtrie. "They helped me go through law school, and they helped me through life."

McMurtrie graduated from Georgetown Law in two and a half years and went to work in the appellate court section of the National Labor Relations Board. Private practice followed, but by the 1970s, his career path took an unexpected turn. His neighbors, concerned about the annexation of part of Chesterfield County by the City of Richmond, suggested that he run for public office. He won a seat in the Virginia House of Delegates by 350 votes in 1972 and stayed there for 10 years. "I was a moderate voice. I never believed in extremes," he says. "Extremes get you into trouble."

He continued to practice law during his time in the legislature and afterwards, doing partnership, corporation, trusts and estates and trial work. In the 1990s, he took a case regarding the pay and pension of state legislators all the way to the Virginia Supreme Court. Always wanting to do the right thing, he represented not the politicians but a group of citizens concerned by the possibility of abuses. At about the same time, he served as the vice chairman of Virginia's Board of Corrections. He's done, he says, "a little bit of everything."

Today, McMurtrie practices at his Richmond firm, McMurtrie, Grubbs and Associates, doing trusts and estates work and "managing money for folks." Though he has managed his own business interests quite well — he was recently named by *Virginia Business* magazine as one of the state's 100 most influential people — he believes that "everyone needs to be encouraged to have a seat at the table." He also knows not to take material things too seriously. "In life, you own nothing, all you do is rent," he says. "It's what you do with what God gave you."

What he's tried to do is improve the lives of others. "Education lifts society to a higher level," McMurtrie says. "It's expected that educated people will help. It's about giving back a little bit, too."