



## Leadership of Frank Ray '73 Shines Again

By **ROB PHILLIPS** The Ohio State University Law School Magazine | Spring 2009

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**O**n **Frank A. Ray**'s first day on the job as chief civil counsel at the Franklin County Prosecutor's Office in 1976, his boss at the time, **George C. Smith '59** (now Senior U. S. District Judge), instructed him to meet the Franklin County Commissioners, whom he would be representing in his new position.

In that initial meeting, Ray '73 met with then-Commissioners Harold M. Cooper and Michael J. Dorrian. The two men told Ray that, on their initiative, the county had just purchased aging and vacant Jet Stadium. The ballpark had fallen into disrepair since the Columbus Jets minor league baseball team left town following the 1970 season.

And Cooper had a dream to return professional baseball to Columbus, Ray said.

"He asked me to write a legal opinion on whether Franklin County could own and operate a stadium that was primarily used for a professional baseball team," said Ray, who admitted that he knew about none of this prior to starting the job.

Just three years out of law school, Ray began navigating what were uncharted waters for him and for such an arrangement. "It was a series of firsts for me," he said.

But his plan – which involved creation of county-related nonprofit corporations that would operate the team and stadium – is still used today. Although he left the prosecutor's office two years after formation of the legal structure for the team and stadium, Ray has continued to represent the corporations in private practice as legal counsel, appointed by Franklin County Prosecutor **Ronald J. O'Brien '74**.

"As best as we can determine, the Columbus Clippers are the only truly publicly-owned professional sports franchise in the United States," Ray said. "The legal organization put in place more than 32 years ago remains in place. It continues to function as the operating structure for

both the county-owned stadium and the team that is owned by the county-related nonprofit organization.”

One of his most recent accomplishments was his participation in efforts to create a new ballpark for the team. Starting in the 2009 season, the Clippers will play in a new \$65 million stadium, Huntington Park. The new ballpark sits in Columbus’ Arena District near Nationwide Arena.

The Board of Trustees of the Clippers called on Ray to help produce and publish an “action and business plan” for a new stadium. “I’m really a trial lawyer,” he said. “And so I did the same thing that I do when I prepare for trial. I identified and assembled the best experts I could find as to each aspect of design, construction, funding, and financing of a ballpark.”

Ray said the result will likely be the “finest minor league baseball park” in the country with nearly \$50 million of the \$65 million cost funded through private and corporate sources. “The current Franklin County commissioners have performed as exemplary partners on this public project,” he said.

The work with the stadiums and the Columbus Clippers comprises just a fraction of Ray’s successful career. He has served as lead counsel in more than 125 jury trials in state and federal courts and in 16 appearances in front of the Supreme Court of Ohio.

Ray has been recognized repeatedly during his more than 35 years as an attorney. He was named “Lawyer of the Year” in 1999 by Ohio Lawyers Weekly, he received the Columbus Bar Association’s Professionalism Award in 1997, and he was awarded the Distinguished Alumnus Award from Moritz in the 2006-07 school year.

He has served as president of the Columbus Bar Association, Franklin County Trial Lawyers Association, Ohio Academy of Trial Lawyers, and the Robert M. Duncan Chapter of American Inns of Court. In July 2009, he will serve as president of the Columbus Bar Foundation, which supports a wide range of initiatives in furtherance of the justice system in Ohio.

And throughout it all, Ray and his wife, Carol, have been continual supporters of the Moritz College of Law. His leadership helped transform the College’s moot courtroom into a state-of-the-art facility that includes a digital evidence presentation system, five courtroom computer displays, plasma screens, video recording/projection systems, and upgraded lighting and sound systems. He and **John C. McDonald ’61** co-chaired the committee that raised \$350,000 to fund the project.

Ray said that he enjoys the direct benefit of the renovation because he uses it in his trial practice course that he teaches at Moritz. Since 2003, Ray has instructed an evening class during the fall semester.

“The students in my class don’t understand how inspiring they are to me,” he said. “I feel like I am the major beneficiary of the class. My students have actually re-enthused me about the practice of trial law. I enjoy the interaction, energy, and commitment from my students.”

His work inside the classroom has not gone unnoticed. He was recognized by the Ohio State Bar Association as the recipient of its Friend of Legal Education Award in 2005.

Ray is a longtime member of the College's National Council, the dean's alumni advisory group. He remains close with many of his law school classmates; he organized the golf outing for the 25th reunion of his law school class and served as chair of the committee for his law class' 30th reunion.

He also has made a commitment to Moritz students in another way. He and his wife started the Frank and Carol Ray Scholarship at the law school that provides full three-year tuition for a Moritz student.

"Carol and I began to ruminate about what we would want to do to produce a personalized impact on the College," he said. "We decided on a scholarship where identifiable individuals would benefit from assistance to attend the College and graduate free of debt."

Ray said that he could not have been more proud of the first recipient of their scholarship, **Carlton J. Willey '08**. He said that it was a small thing that he could do to help the College that has meant so much to him, professionally and personally.

"After more than three decades of good fortune in the practice of law, it is inescapable that the opportunity to perform as a professional was made possible by the College of Law."

Tags: [Carlton Willey](#), [Frank Ray](#), [George Smith](#), [John McDonald](#), [Ronald O'Brien](#)



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