

MEMORIAL FOR CHANCELLOR ROBERT VANN OWENS

Robert Vann Owens was born in 1931 in Birmingham, Alabama and raised on Missionary Ridge in Chattanooga. He graduated from Chattanooga High School, lettering in boxing and football. He then went to Auburn University where he was a member of Pi Kappa Phi and Tau Beta Pi, but his most distinguished honor was marrying a “Miss Auburn,” the former Janice Williams. They enjoyed 56 years of marriage before her death in 2009. Later he married Betty Barnes Aquadro and they enjoyed six and a half wonderful years together.

Upon graduating from Auburn University with a Bachelor of Science degree in aeronautical engineering, Mr. Owens was commissioned an Ensign in the U.S. Navy. After his tours of duty in the Korean War, he was employed by NASA at the Redstone Arsenal in Huntsville, Alabama, eventually becoming a supervisor of the wind tunnel test engineers. Many of the reports and reference bulletins concerning missiles and space configuration aerodynamics were written by him.

Vann Owens then decided to pursue a legal career. He and his wife and their three children relocated to Alcoa, Tennessee, so that he could enter law school at the University of Tennessee. Vann Owens was inducted into the Order of the Coif, and graduated first in his class.

He returned to Chattanooga and was hired as an associate at Bishop, Thomas, Leitner, Mann & Milburn. When he left to take the bench 21 years later, the firm was known as Leitner, Warner, Owens, Moffit, Williams and Dooley. His partners recall that his trial notebooks were something to behold.

In December of 1984 Governor Lamar Alexander appointed Vann Owens to be the Chancellor of Part 1 of the Hamilton County Chancery Court.

Chancellor Owens won an election to finish the term in 1986 and ran unopposed in 1990. Before his retirement in 1998, he had served as President of the Tennessee Trial Judges Association and President of the Tennessee Trial Conference. He was on the Board of Governors of the Tennessee Bar Association, and served two terms as Presiding Judge of the 11th Judicial District.

As a jurist he was diligent, conscientious and hard working.

A life-long learner, Chancellor Owens learned to fly and to sail, took multiple photography classes and set up his own dark room in his home. He took computer programming classes at Chattanooga State, and was an avid tennis and bridge player competing in leagues and tournaments for both.

Chancellor Owens had the pleasure to swear in his son, Bruce, as Juvenile Court Magistrate.

Magistrate Bruce Owens told me if his father were speaking today he would say, “Be humble, do what is right and just. Help the less privileged and those in need. Be faithful, stay close to God, and remember to let loved ones know how much you love them.”

Chancellor Owens passed on March 13, 2018 at the age of 86.

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, this 12th day of June, 2019 that this memorial in honor of the Honorable Robert Vann Owens be entered in the minutes of the Tennessee Judicial Conference and published accordingly.

Respectfully submitted the 12th day of June, 2019.

Pam Fleenor
Chancellor 11th Judicial District
Hamilton County