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LIFETIME ACHIEVERS 2013

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Our 10th annual awards honor distinctive careers and public service.

RONALD OLSON
MUNGER, TOLLES & OLSON

IN 2004 MY PREDECESSOR, ARIC PRESS, created The American Lawyer Lifetime Achievement Awards to honor men and women who had distinguished careers at the country's preeminent law firms and legal departments. Press had very specific criteria in selecting the first class: The lawyers must have achieved notable professional and pro bono/government or civic success. He wasn't knocking the workaholic lawyers who single-mindedly devote themselves to their paying clients. Instead, Press was trying to recognize attorneys who might serve as a role model for law firm lawyers: accomplished practitioners who found the time to help the indigent or take a few years (and a pay cut) to do government service. Press also wanted to draw honorees from the ranks of lawyers who were late in their careers or who had retired. He envisioned the awards like the Baseball Hall of Fame, where an inductee's work would be judged by the rearview mirror of history.

Robert Joffe, the renowned Cravath, Swaine & Moore presiding partner, also shaped Press's thinking. Joffe thought *The American Lawyer* should honor men like his colleague Frederick A.O. Schwarz Jr., who, over the course of his working life, went back and forth between Cravath and stints advising an important U.S. Senate investigation and serving as New York City's corporation counsel. Schwarz, and others like him, became the model for selecting our honorees—including the 2013 class of Lifetime Achievers.

—ROBIN SPARKMAN



PHOTOGRAPHY PORTFOLIO BY MICHAEL J.N. BOWLES

MUNGER, TOLLES & OLSON NAME partner Ronald Olson's first trial was far removed from the high stakes and boldface names with which he would become synonymous. He represented the wife of a firm client in a suit against her interior decorator. "The drapes weren't right," says Olson, summing up the 40-year-old case (he can't remember who won). "We had a very modest practice," he says of the then 10-lawyer Munger, Tolles, Hills & Rickershauser. "Big litigation wasn't a part of it."

In the ensuing years, nothing would be farther from the truth. Olson went on to represent movie studios in industry-redefining antitrust litigation and legislative initiatives, a consortium of oil companies in connection with the *Exxon Valdez* spill, and the Republic of the Philippines in efforts to retrieve assets from former president Ferdinand Marcos. Along the way, Olson, now 72, became a trusted adviser to a host of corporate power brokers. His client roster has included Google Inc. founders Sergey Brin and Larry Page, Hollywood agent Michael Ovitz, Paramount Pictures Corporation chief Brad Grey, and entertainment industry mogul Barry Diller. "You build relationships with integrity and put some energy into them and a lot of good things happen," Olson says.

One of Olson's most significant client relationships, spanning corporate transactions, litigation, and government investigations, has been with Warren Buffett's Berkshire Hathaway Inc., where Olson currently is a board member. (Munger cofounder Charles Munger is Buffett's longtime business partner.)

In Hollywood everyone has a big-break story, and Olson is no different. In 1975 he was hired by television writers to challenge the "family viewing hour," a Federal Communications Commission rule that restricted the type of content that could air on television before 9 P.M. "They decided to take a risk on me, and we brought a First Amendment case," Olson says. The challenge

succeeded, and the win became a calling card for Olson and for his firm, which today has some 200 lawyers at offices in Los Angeles and San Francisco.

Today, the Iowa-born Olson sits on five corporate boards, but it's his presence on the boards of such local institutions as Southern California Public Radio that best illustrates his commitment to his adopted home. "I consider myself lucky to have ended up in a place where there isn't any hesitation about embracing new ideas and people," Olson says. "I see it as my duty to engage in service to benefit Los Angeles because I'm a professional with special skills sets, and I'm someone who has benefited from this community."

—DREW COMBS

IN HIS OWN WORDS

What book has influenced you the most?

The various writings and teachings of Charlie Munger and Warren Buffett. Their fundamental values and philosophy regarding life and business have influenced me as a lawyer and a person.

What is your greatest personal accomplishment?

I have been married for 49 years. The family that Jane and I have built is without question my biggest personal accomplishment.

What is your biggest professional accomplishment?

Helping build our firm's special culture, which is focused on excellence, fairness, community, and client commitment, [as well as] diversity of persons and thought.

What would you have done differently or what is your biggest regret?

There are things I would do differently, but nothing I fundamentally regret.