

IN MEMORIAM: A TRIBUTE TO PROFESSORS CONBOY, EISSINGER, HUNT, KRAHMER & WENINGER – PILLARS OF TECH LAW

*Walter B. Huffman**

A law school's foundation is its faculty, and this is especially true of those faculty who have served a school for extended years. That being so, from January 2017 through April 2018, Tech Law's foundation suffered significant loss with the passing of Professors Don Hunt in January 2017, Jim Eissinger in June 2017, Bob Weninger in November 2017, Joe Conboy in February 2018 and John Krahmer in April 2018. It is impossible to describe in detail in this memorial the myriad contributions each of these men made to Tech Law, but it is my honor to attempt to memorialize the service of these Tech Law pillars—all of whom I knew well and three of whom who taught me as a student at Tech Law.

Professor Don Hunt, known to all as “Coach Hunt,” joined Tech Law as an Adjunct Professor in 1972. An outstanding appellate lawyer in private practice, Coach Hunt dedicated innumerable hours to coaching Tech Law's Moot Court teams for over 30 years, and the numerous national, regional and state championships won by those teams earned Tech Law a reputation as one of the leading advocacy schools in the nation. He was my coach “back in the day,” and I and hundreds of other Tech Law graduates will always appreciate his teaching and guidance. As perhaps his most famous former student-advocate, Mark Lanier, said in naming the new courtroom in the Lanier Center after Donald M. Hunt, “Don Hunt changed my life and made me really understand both the art and the science of advocacy.”

Professor Jim Eissinger also joined the Tech Law Faculty in 1972, and even after his “retirement” continued teaching part-time at the law school up until his passing. Jim came to Tech Law from the faculty at the North Dakota School of Law. He was a person who loved teaching, and his students loved him as they demonstrated by voting him as the Outstanding Law Professor of the year several times during his tenure. Those of us who knew and worked with Jim Eissinger also admired him not only as a very talented teacher, but also as a person of the highest character and integrity. Erudite and articulate, he set the standard in appearance and conduct for those both in the profession of law and those studying to become lawyers. As testament to that, Jim was chosen to serve as Interim Dean of the Law School when

* Dean Emeritus and Professor of Law; Major General, U.S. Army, Retired. B.A., Texas Tech University, 1967; M.Ed., 1968; J.D., 1977.

Frank Newton stepped down in 2001. James R. Eissinger served our school and its students exceptionally for forty-five years, and his contributions were truly significant.

Professor Bob Weninger joined the Tech Law faculty in 1974 after beginning his teaching career in San Diego following practice as a trial lawyer. Perhaps one of the most unique and engaging long-term members of our law faculty, Bob was still a full-time professor at the time of his passing—a tenure of forty-three years. Bicycling to work into his 80's, a pilot, an avid tennis player and dancer, Bob really was unique. And he could and would discuss any topic with anyone—all with a smile on his face. It was impossible not to like Bob Weninger. As a former student of Professor Weninger's, I can attest that his friendliness did not translate into "easy instructor." He knew the law, continually studied himself, and he expected students to work as hard as he did. His complex litigation course reputedly was one of the most difficult at Tech Law, yet there was always a waiting list to get in. In fact, his teaching excellence led to the creation of an informal "Order of the Weni," for those students who took multiple courses from Bob. He also excelled at empirical legal research, and his scholarly efforts were regularly published in prestigious legal journals. Most important, though, Bob Weninger was a person who invested in people. He always mentored junior faculty, and he absolutely loved mentoring students and reveling in their successes. Many people owe a debt of thanks to Professor Robert A. Weninger.

Professor Joe Conboy, a former Army Judge Advocate Colonel, joined Tech Law from the University of Alabama Law School and served Tech Law as Associate Dean and Professor for thirty years. A big man with an even bigger heart, Joe taught Sports Law and trial advocacy, and he was an excellent professor, but he is best remembered for his long tenure as Associate Dean for Students. When the news of Joe's passing was posted on the Tech Law Alumni list serve, the outpouring of grief and appreciation was extraordinary. It was clear from the Alumni comments that Joe was the person responsible for guiding many a Tech Law student through troubling waters and propelling them on to successful legal careers. One student described him as sort of a one-man Salvation Army: "He was always there, he never judged, he always helped." As another now successful graduate remarked, "if not for Dean Conboy, this very scared girl would have been gone after week one." It is hard to objectify caring, but the comments from students whose lives were touched in a positive way is a great tribute to the caring heart and Tech Law legacy of Joseph B. Conboy.

Professor John E. Kraemer joined Tech Law in 1971 and was the longest-serving member of the faculty when he retired from full-time teaching in August 2017. He was also one of the most influential professors at our law school. Editor of both the Texas Bank Lawyer and American Bank Lawyer publications, author of nine legal texts and practice guides on

commercial and banking law, John was truly both “Mr. Banking Law,” and “Mr. Commercial Law” in Texas and beyond. His teaching prowess was legendary. Voted Outstanding Professor seven different times by students, he was also the first law faculty member to receive the Texas Tech Chancellor’s Award for Outstanding Teaching. To his former students, including me, John’s deep knowledge, prodigious intelligence and quick wit made him the epitome of a great law professor. Most important, a number of his former students seconded this student’s remarks upon his passing, “Professor John Kraemer supported me, cared about me, and enabled me to be the lawyer that I am. I will always remember him with fondness and gratitude.”

I reiterate that it is impossible to fully or even accurately describe the contributions of five people who gave so much to our law school in this short memorial. I do hope that these short profiles do make it clear both that without the contributions of these five men, Texas Tech Law would not be what it is today, and that our graduates are a testament to their talent and dedication.

Walter B. Huffman
Dean Emeritus and Professor of Law
Tech Law, 1977