Tribute to Wilbur C. Leatherberry

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Without a doubt, Bill Leatherberry deserves the title of Citizen Extraordinaire of Case Western Reserve University School of Law. His devotion to the law school is unsurpassed, and his contributions to the school are exemplary. It is indeed a privilege to write in his honor.

When I first met Bill in 1977 upon my joining the Law School faculty as an assistant professor, Bill had already established long-standing and deep ties to the University. A magna cum laude, Phi Beta Kappa graduate of the college, he earned his J.D. at the Law School in 1968, graduating Order of the Coif and on the Law Review. Although he spent five years in service as a staff attorney at the Legal Aid Society of Cleveland and as Legislative Assistant to Congressman Louis Stokes, Bill soon returned to the Law School as an Assistant Professor in 1973. After thirty-nine years on the faculty, he leaves his cherished institution stronger and more humane due to his valued contributions. His daily genial and thoughtful presence will be sorely missed.

Bill’s contributions to the Law School take many forms. First, as a teacher, he has taught legions of law students the intricacies of contracts, insurance, sales, products liability, and the lawyering process. In all my years connected with the Law School, I never heard an unkind word spoken with respect to Bill’s knowledge of his subject, his classroom demeanor, or his professionalism. He was a teacher who, the students knew, wanted to foster learning, both inside and outside the classroom, and to develop the students’ mastery of subjects that excited his intellectual curiosity.

Second, as an author, Bill has written thoughtful pieces ranging from insurance law to divorce law to alternative dispute resolution. Relatedly, he has served on numerous ADR panels and committees, putting into practice his academic expertise.

Most important in my view has been Bill’s service to the Law School. Culminating in his long service as Associate Dean for Academic Affairs, his service to the Law School is unparalleled. Whenever any Dean asked, Bill accepted the responsibility and met the challenge, whatever the administrative assignment. Bill spent endless hours as Academic Dean arranging for faculty to teach needed classes, scheduling courses, and addressing student concerns and problems. Throughout all controversies, Bill remained calm and thoughtful, coming to peaceable solutions reflecting his wealth of

† Faculty Member 1977–1995; Judge, United States Court of Appeals for the Sixth Circuit 1995–.
ADR expertise. No one was more adept than Bill at resolving Law School dilemmas, large and small. And no one cared more for the students than Bill. Most recently, Bill’s administrative skills have enriched student experiences through the federal judicial externship program, under which Bill has placed outstanding law students in the chambers of federal judges.

As a former colleague, I treasure Bill as a friend. He was unfailingly collegial, he took seriously his role as mentor to junior faculty, and he supported other faculty members’ teaching and scholarship with constructive and helpful comments. But Bill also was and is devoted to the Cleveland-area community beyond the Law School, and he maintains an active interest in legal services and politics from his early days as a lawyer.

Citizen Extraordinaire of both the Law School and the Cleveland community, Bill marks with his retirement a new beginning of another chapter in his life of service for the greater good. I am sure that both the Law School and the community will benefit in the years to come from Bill’s enthusiasm, energy, and excitement in constructively addressing civic issues.