



In Memoriam – John W. Mooty (1922-2015)

April 20, 2015

"I think I'm a better lawyer because I understand business. And I think I do better on the business end because I understand legal problems."

- *John Mooty, 2003*

John Mooty was one of the most successful and respected corporate attorneys, community leaders, and businessmen in Minnesota.

John died on April 17, 2015. At the time of his death, John was 92 and had actively practiced law and held board positions for 70 years. He was an inspiration for his family, colleagues, clients, and the community.

John was born and raised in Adrian, Minn., a tiny town outside of Worthington, in 1922. He was the son of a banker whose business closed when the market crashed in 1929. The Mootys didn't have much, but John and his brother Melvin worked a variety of jobs, including manual labor, to earn cash. John learned a lesson about the value of money during the Depression when he was sent to the store one day with a dime to buy meat for the family's dinner. He lost the dime and the family went without food for the day. It was a lesson he never forgot.

John's interest in the law was sparked during high school and after he graduated from the University of Minnesota, as the first of his family to achieve a post-college degree, attending the University of Minnesota Law School.

In 1945, John joined 12 other attorneys at the Minneapolis law firm of Kingman Cross Morely Cant & Taylor, which eventually became Gray Plant Mooty. He spent his entire career with the firm and served as its managing officer for more than 20 years. During his career, John built a widely admired specialty in corporate law and helped save and grow two of the country's most successful franchise brands.

In 1959, John became part owner of, and general counsel for, National Car Rental. The firm had become insolvent and was moved to Minneapolis. John negotiated key deals with General Motors and developed various franchisees' territories, work that ultimately turned the company's fortunes around. National was bought in 1969, and went on to become one of the nation's most successful car rental companies.



John found almost exactly the same scenario at International Dairy Queen in 1970, when he and his business partners purchased a controlling interest in the struggling franchisor.

John and his management team began by refocusing the company on its core business of treats. He was eventually named chairman of Dairy Queen in 1976, a position he held for more than 20 years. In 1998, Warren Buffett bought Dairy Queen in a deal worth more than \$550 million.

When John joined Gray Plant Mooty 70 years ago, the managing partner told him "lawyers have an extra-special duty to get involved in the community. They're equipped with tools that make them especially valuable."

John far exceeded those expectations set before him as a young lawyer. His civic work over the last half-century is unrivalled and he will forever be recognized as a community leader. This mindset also helped shape a culture of corporate responsibility that pervades Gray Plant Mooty to this day.

John was one of the University of Minnesota's most loyal and dedicated supporters (and of course a life-long Gophers fan). He was a past president of the Alumni Association and helped create many scholarship funds. The Gray, Plant, Mooty, Mooty & Bennett Foundation Professorship was created in his honor. He received the Alumni Service Award in 1985 and the Minnesota Law Review's Distinguished Alumni Award in 2007. In 1990, John received the University's highest honor, the Outstanding Achievement Award.

An uncanny ability to solve problems and bring about consensus caused him to be selected to chair many civic committees. In 1966, John was chair of the Citizens League committee that recommended a publicly-financed zoo - the initial impetus for the creation of the Minnesota Zoo. He also served as chair of Governor Quie's education task force that made many significant recommendations, most of which very closely paralleled President Reagan's actions at the federal level to reform education.

John was also very active and successful in politics, and helped shape today's Minnesota Republican Party. He was vice chairman and acting state chairman of the Minnesota GOP, and he also served as statewide chairman in attorney general, gubernatorial, United States Senatorial, and Presidential campaigns. John was instrumental in creating today's endorsement procedure for the Minnesota Republican Party.

An active Rotarian for many decades, John served as program chair, vice president, and president of the club and led the Polio Plus campaign for Minneapolis Rotary. In 2007, he was honored with the Marty Baskerville Philanthropy Award from the Minneapolis Rotary Community Service Foundation.

John continued to be a part Gray Plant Mooty into his 92nd year, and continued to practice law, take on pro bono work, and hold several positions of corporate leadership. He inspired us all and gave more of us the honor to practice alongside one of the state's legendary corporate lawyers.



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