

DSS Awards

AMOS, MELTON AND PAYNE RECEIVE TOP HONORS

The School of Law recognized three individuals for their service during the school's Fifth Annual Alumni/Alumnae Weekend. Kathelen V. Amos (J.D.'82), Harold D. Melton (J.D.'91) and William Porter "Billy" Payne (J.D.'73) received the Law School Association's highest honor – the Distinguished Service Scroll Award – for their outstanding dedication and service to the legal profession and the law school.

Amos worked in private practice for two years before joining Aflac as a staff attorney. After becoming deputy counsel in 1992, she was responsible for the company's public and media relations, corporate philanthropy, shareholder services department and eventually corporate advertising. She became the insurance company's first female executive vice president in 2001. Since officially retiring from Aflac, she has remained the senior relationship advisor with the Aflac Cancer Center, and she presently serves as president of the Aflac Foundation. In 2012, Amos embarked on a second professional endeavor as a registered nurse, working in the oncology field.

As chair of the School of Law's Board of Visitors, she endowed the Kathelen Amos Scholarship, contributed a lead gift to the law school renovation, helped initiate the Rebecca Hanner White Scholarship and, along with the Daniel P. Amos Family Foundation, established the First-Start Scholars Program which will transform the legal education experience for many of the law school's first-generation college graduates.

Audrey Boone Tillman (J.D.'89), executive vice president and general counsel of Aflac, presented Amos with her award.

"Her reputation was impeccable," Tillman said of Amos' career at Aflac. "Not just as a brilliant lawyer but as a reasonable-

minded problem solver and a go-to person – someone who was working on everything important that was going on in the company. ... She was a model for us all as a working executive with small children, as a parent to adults, through every season – even those unimaginable ones – showing her tremendous strength and unshakable faith as an example," she added.

Melton was appointed to the Georgia Supreme Court by Gov. Sonny Perdue in 2005 and became the court's chief justice in 2018. Prior to joining the court, he served as executive counsel to Perdue, representing the governor on legal issues covering the entire scope of state government. In this role, he helped safeguard Georgia's interests in water rights disputes with Alabama and Florida, and he actively participated in administration efforts to advance the delivery of criminal justice services in the state.

Before serving as executive counsel, Melton spent 11 years in the Georgia Department of Law under two attorneys general where he dealt with issues ranging from the creation of the Georgia Lottery Corporation to the administration of Georgia's tobacco settlement. Prior to leaving to join the Governor's Office, he was section leader over the Consumer Interests Division. Melton currently sits on the board of Atlanta Youth Academies as well as on the national and local boards of Young Life, which he previously served as a volunteer leader of its ministries for 11 years.

Santhia L. Curtis (J.D.'91) presented Melton with his award. She is currently the deputy general counsel at the Atlanta Independent School System.



Aflac Foundation President and former UGA School of Law Board of Visitors Chair Kathelen Amos (J.D.'82) (left) received her honor from Audrey Boone Tillman (J.D.'89), the executive vice president and general counsel of Aflac.



Deputy General Counsel at the Atlanta Independent School System Santhia Curtis (J.D.'91) presented Georgia Supreme Court Chief Justice Harold Melton (J.D.'91) with his award.



Read Morton (J.D.'73), a retired partner of the firm Burr & Forman, gave Centennial Holding Corporation Chairman Billy Payne (J.D.'73) (left) his DSS recognition.

Photos by Ian McFarlane.

Remarking on their three-decade-long friendship, Curtis told Melton that “borrowing the words of [his] mentor, the late Justice Harry Hines, ‘you’re still as shiny as any penny.’”

“Justice Melton exemplifies the qualities that [make you] wish there were more people like him,” she added. “... As impressive as his professional accomplishments are, as equally as impressive is his dedication to the youth of the state of Georgia. He has a long history of investing in youth. ... He believes that youth don’t care what you know until they know that you care.”

Payne is most notable for his role as president and CEO of the Atlanta 1996 Centennial Olympic Games. He was the first person in modern Olympic history to lead a host city’s organizing effort from bid to closing ceremony, from 1987 to 1997. After the Olympics, he served in leadership positions with NationsBank, PTEK Holdings, WebMD and Gleacher & Company.

Presently, he holds the position of chair of the Centennial Holding Corporation, which specializes in the acquisition and management of multi-family properties. He also serves on the boards of Altec, Workday and Learfield.

Among his many accolades are being inducted into the Georgia Sports Hall of Fame as well as receiving the Olympic Order in Gold, a Distinguished Service Award from the Martin Luther King, Jr. Center for Non-Violent Social Change, the Distinguished Community Service Award from the Atlanta Urban League, the Georgia Governor’s International Lifetime Achievement Award, the Theodore Roosevelt Award – the highest honor bestowed by the NCAA – and the Distinguished American Award presented by the National Football Foundation.

C. Read Morton Jr. (J.D.’73) presented Payne with his honor. Morton is a retired partner of the firm Burr & Forman.

“He truly is a great UGA and law school supporter,” Morton said of Payne. “... He’s given in so many ways that are behind the scenes. He also strongly supports the mission of the law school in addition to helping [Dean Bo Rutledge]. He’s been a major force behind the Morton and Payne Scholarship Fund that we created in the 1990s.”

However, Morton said there was one attribute that stands out about his longtime friend: “There are many things, truly, that are admirable about Billy Payne and what he’s done in this world but I will say of all the traits that I really hold the dearest for Billy is his thought that his family is paramount in everything he does. There’s no question.”

Ball receives Young Alumni/ Alumnae of Excellence Award


The School of Law’s Young Alumni/Alumnae of Excellence Award was presented to Mercedes G. Ball (J.D.’09).

Created by the law school’s Young Alumni/Alumnae Committee, this award recognizes an outstanding young graduate of the law school who gives gifts of time or talent to the law school community or community at large.

The award was presented to Ball by Audrey A. Lewis (J.D.’10), an assistant district attorney for the Augusta Judicial Circuit.

Ball currently ensures attorney compliance with the Georgia Rules of Professional Conduct as the Consumer Assistance Program assistant director at the State Bar of Georgia.

Previously, she was a child advocate attorney at the DeKalb County Child Advocacy Center, where she holistically represented the interests of children who had been abused, abandoned or neglected in civil court proceedings, mediations, panels and administrative



Young Alumni/Alumnae of Excellence Award recipient Mercedes Ball (J.D.’09) (left) received her honor from Augusta Judicial Circuit Assistant District Attorney Audrey Lewis (J.D.’10). Photo by Ian McFarlane.

hearings. She also worked as a lead trial attorney representing indigent individuals in criminal proceedings at a metro-Atlanta law firm.

Ball is an active volunteer and serves as the executive director of the Sister2Sister Mentoring Program, a DeKalb County and Fulton County Juvenile Court diversion program that focuses on developing court-involved teen girls into purpose-driven young women. She is also vice president of the Junior League of DeKalb’s Community Council. In 2018, she pitched and launched the DeKalb Saturday Scholars Initiative, a literacy-focused Saturday school, through a partnership with Junior League, the DeKalb County Solicitor General’s Office and Oak View Elementary School.