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## Tribute to Prof. Jarret Oeltjen

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## TRIBUTE



**JARRET C. OELTJEN**

I am pleased to write this tribute to Professor Jarret Oeltjen, who has retired from the faculty of the Florida State University College of Law. Since Jarret came to Tallahassee thirty-three years ago, we have been friends and colleagues. He has been a great teacher and scholar.

Jarret's primary teaching has been in contracts, commercial law and consumer law. His scholarship has been excellent and diverse. Among his early works is a series of in-depth pieces on water and natural resources law. His interests turned to consumer issues when he worked with the Florida Legislature on a series of progressive legislative acts modernizing our consumer finance law. His involvement led to articles dealing with usury and consumer credit, and culminated in a series of articles on pawnbroking. These latter articles were nationally recognized as the leading policy analysis of this often over-looked area. Perhaps the area in which he has had the greatest impact on both lawyers and the commercial community is in his publication containing the widely used forms for transactions under the Uniform Commercial Code. This three volume work was originally published in 1982 and has since been updated annually.

Jarret is widely respected as a teacher. He is from what some call the "old school" and has a deep interest in his students. Rather than posting limited office hours when he would see students, Jarret had an open-door policy. When he was in the office, his door was open and he was available to talk to students on whatever issue they wished to discuss. His advice was widely sought on both academic and personal matters.

Jarret was equally dedicated to his faculty colleagues. He was a good citizen who served well on committees. He was open-minded, hardworking and congenial. There are few law school committees on

which Jarret has not served his duty as chair. Perhaps the most demanding service was his three-year stint as Associate Dean. I remember that during this time the university was changing from the quarter system to the semester system. Almost single-handedly, a new curriculum had to be designed, teaching assignments had to be changed and egos massaged. With very little help, Jarret successfully lead the school through this relatively smooth transition.

Much of his success I attribute to his upbringing in a small mid-western community. He is hardworking, honest and even-tempered. In fact, I don't remember seeing him lose his temper or raise his voice to others in the thirty-three years we have known each other. At some of the school's most contentious moments, Jarret acted as a mediator between competing factions and no one doubted his sincerity. He is my friend, has been my partner in ventures and is a person that I turn to for sound advice.

One of his highest accolades is that Jarret was hired by Mason Ladd, our founding dean and long-time legal educator. As the story goes, Mason, who was his own hiring committee, was having trouble finding the right young faculty star to teach commercial law. As was his custom, he called the deans of the leading law schools. Phil Neal of the University of Chicago told Mason that he had the number one graduate of the University of Nebraska as a Bigelow Fellow and strongly recommended Jarret. The conversation occurred over the Christmas holidays when Jarret was home in Nebraska. When Mason called the school trying to find him, he happened to be in Lincoln visiting old faculty. When the dean's secretary located him, Jarret was skeptical whether Mason was really on the line. When they talked, Mason told him that he was looking for a commercial law professor. Jarret was interested—Mason, in his own way, then asked: "Can you catch a plane today?" When Jarret replied that he would like to talk with Sharon, Mason said: "You do that and fly down tomorrow." Of course, Jarret flew down.<sup>1</sup>

Mason picked him up at the airport and Jarret stayed in the Ladd's spare bedroom. After a morning of interviews, the assistant dean showed Jarret around Tallahassee. When they returned to Longmire—the law school's first home—the faculty had met and approved the Dean's recommendation that Jarret be hired. When made the offer that afternoon, Jarret said that he would like a couple of days to think about it. Mason's reply was that "if you are going to look around, we are going to look around, too." Two days later, Jarret called to accept the offer and join the faculty.

There was at least one surprise in the fall for both him and Sharon when they arrived in Tallahassee with their one-year-old son in their

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1. Jarret was much more sophisticated than I was—Mason hired me on the telephone without me realizing that I could fly from the midwest to Florida for an interview. In hindsight, this was probably to my advantage.

Camaro, pulling a U-Haul trailer.<sup>2</sup> In telling Sharon about their new home, Jarret reported that Tallahassee was flat. (Mason was not known for his driving skills or stopping for red lights, and since he was the primary chauffeur, Jarret was so scared he wasn't able to remember the landscape.) They rapidly adjusted and quickly overcame an obstacle—they did not have a place to live when they arrived. Fortunately, they found an apartment on White Drive and settled into the community.

Jarret and Sharon were heavily involved in the raising of their four successful children. I remember his coaching of baseball and soccer for over ten years and his involvement with his children's school and his church.

Jarret was Mason Ladd's final hire as a law school dean. I am convinced that if Mason were still here to evaluate J's career, he would be pleased with Jarret's achievements and would join the law school community in saying that his was a job "well done." Jarret's portrait hangs in the College of Law as an inspiration to all of his students, colleagues and friends.

*Charles W. Ehrhardt*

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2. This was the first time Sharon had seen Tallahassee. In those days, a spouse did not come for a job interview and no follow-up visit occurred.