



# in the family

**D**espite his surname, Victor H. Laws was the first to become a lawyer in the history of his family. It is more than a coincidence that the man bears the name of the profession he practices. Victor Laws worked diligently—as did his family—for that parallel to exist.

“I went to law school during the Depression. My family made sacrifices for me to attend and the school offered favorable tuition rates to Maryland residents,” Laws explains. “A college education was a great prize in those days.”

Laws is humble and sincere. He recognizes the value of his legal education and has remained an active alumnus of the University of Maryland School of Law. Since his graduation 58 years ago, Laws witnessed the second in his family to receive a degree in law, his eldest son. Laws’ consistent commitment and consistency to his alma mater is genuine. He is beholden to his chance at education and admits that law served as a springboard for other successes.

### One-room School House to County Council

Throughout his 55 years of practice and three years with the Army Signal Corps in World War II, Laws has been active in local law, business and politics. Born in Salisbury in 1919, his education began in the one-room Wango elementary school. Upon being admitted to the Maryland Bar in 1941, he first practiced in Salisbury and then in Baltimore with several law firms, including Miles and Stockbridge. Laws worked there for 12 years as associate and partner before returning to Salisbury in 1957, where he worked with several well-known local lawyers before establishing a family law firm.

(Above) Victor H. Laws '41 practices with his eldest son Victor '78 and his daughter-in-law Jean '78 (not pictured).



There is a sense that this is a man from a bygone era. Victor Laws is an honest business man, a family business man.

Oxymorons. But in business as well as politics, Laws serves to better the community, not his

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name. He was vice president of the Maryland State Bar

Association and president of the Wicomico County Bar Association, and is currently a member of both professional associations. In 1983 he was appointed by the Maryland Court of Appeals as a trustee of the Clients' Security Trust Fund of the Bar of Maryland. He became chairman of the fund's trustees in 1986 and still serves in that capacity.

In local politics, Laws was appointed City Solicitor of Salisbury in 1960 and reappointed in 1962. He was elected to public office in 1962 as a member of the Wicomico County Democratic State

Central Committee. In 1974 he was elected to the Wicomico County Council, re-elected in 1978 and 1982, retired in 1986, then again elected in 1994, serving a total of 16 years.

### All in the Family

A friend jokingly suggested that Laws' firm's name be Laws and In-Laws instead of Laws and Laws. He and his eldest son, Victor H. Laws III '78, and his classmate and wife, Jean S. Laws '78, have occupied 209 E. Main St. in Salisbury since 1984, running a general practice. "I moved my law offices 14 times over the years," Laws exclaims, before settling in his native Salisbury. "[The family firm] has been an extremely happy and rewarding relationship."

After practicing together for three years, Laws recalls his son asking if he were pleased with their arrangement. Laws replied, "This is the happiest I've been since I practiced alone. It is a rare privilege to practice with my son and daughter-in-law."

Laws' youngest son, Gerald A. Laws, lives in Arlington, Texas, and is a journalism graduate of the University of Missouri. As for his youngest son's departure from the path his elder brother and father traveled, Laws light-heartedly remarks, "I tried to make an honest recruit out of him; he flatly refused."

### All-terrain Vehicle

Throughout his years of practice, Laws noted that nothing stays the same. When he started practicing, the Maryland Code was three volumes: two volumes of public general laws and one volume of local laws. There was one appellate court, no general practice rules, no statewide list of practicing lawyers and no discovery process. "The whole landscape has changed. Then, when trying a case, it was more like a high-stakes game. You didn't know what to expect," Laws says. The old adage held true, he confesses, "You begin your education when admitted to the Bar."

While Laws concedes that this ever-changing legal countryside

puts a lawyer to the test and that it is simultaneously challenging, interesting, enlarging and frustrating, he heartily agrees with his colleague retired Judge Robert Duer. When Duer was questioned about all the changes he witnessed during his tenure, he responded, "Yes, there have been a lot of changes and I've been against every damn one."

### David v. Goliath

Being able to handle the road is only half the battle. Victor Laws stood his ground and staked a claim. In the late '60s, Laws represented a local roofer who had won a bid for installing a roofing system for Chesapeake Community College. The local roofer was using a new process developed by Dow Chemical and Certain-Teed Corp. What should have lasted 20 years only lasted one, when rain water poured into the classrooms. Laws fought for seven years on a contingency basis, since his client couldn't afford otherwise. He pushed the case through the Circuit Court in Talbot County, which found in favor of the plaintiff, then to the Court of Special Appeals, which affirmed, 26 Md. App. 452 (1975) and finally to the Court of Appeals, which denied certiorari, 276 Md. 739, 741. All found in favor of the plaintiff, making this case the first in the country to expose these materials as insufficient.

Laws remembers the satisfaction of taking on such large corporations and winning. What buoyed him was the excitement surrounding the case and the outcome: "It was a David and Goliath atmosphere."

### A Solid Foundation is a Sure Thing

When the School of Law hosts reunions and luncheons, Laws attends. When the law school seeks support, Laws responds. He can spot a sure thing—the School of Law and the education he received are exactly that.

**“It dawned on me that the foundation of law is common sense.”**

Laws remembers an epiphany in his second year of law school: He was bored, receiving grades of one B, one D, and all the rest Cs. "I didn't like reading those interminable case studies." Until one day, then-Dean Roger Howell called on him in class. Laws responded to his question with a canned answer (he was studying from the equivalent of Cliff Notes). Dean Howell knew all too well where his answer originated and delved further into the subject with him until, Laws says, "I finally stumbled upon the right answer. It dawned on me that the foundation of law is common sense." From that point, law was exciting. Every day was different, and case studies weren't nearly so painful to review. Law was not boring and repetitive.

And neither is this lawyer. At the age of 80, Laws has no plans for retirement: "As long as my health permits I will work every day."

Victor Laws is certainly a sure thing. **JD**