

# Richard Duvall

## An Attitude of Gratitude

In early 1994, Richard Duvall was flying high as a prominent member of the D.C. area legal community. He'd just successfully led the merger of Dunnells & Duvall, a firm he had co-founded twenty years earlier, into Holland & Knight, then a firm based in Florida with a small office in D.C. He was burning the candle at both ends, helping in the transition and firm building effort in Washington, D.C., while maintaining an active law practice. But life was good. He was happily married and had four terrific children, many wonderful friends and colleagues, and a successful law practice.

But within several weeks of the merger Richard got the phone call feared by every parent. His oldest son, Tyler, a third year student at Washington & Lee University (W&L), was in critical condition with Meningococcal Toxemia (Meningitis of the bloodstream), a disease with a very high mortality rate. The hospital in Lexington, Virginia was trying to get Tyler medevac'd to the University of Virginia Hospital. "I drove down that night to Charlottesville, and it was literally touch and go," remembers Richard solemnly.

Richard still marvels at all the things that had to go right in order for Tyler to still be here today.

Had the trainer for the W&L basketball team not stopped by to see Tyler because he had missed practice, Tyler would likely have been found dead in his room; he was unable to mobilize to get help. The same result would have followed if the internist in Lexington had not started treating him with high doses of penicillin before getting the results from his blood tests. And it was imperative to get Tyler cleared for admission to UVA before the helicopter could take off from Lexington. With luck, Richard was able to reach his brother, a prominent internist in D.C., who had attended medical school with the Head of Infectious Diseases at UVA; Dr. Duvall was able to

short cut what could have been a lengthy, and fatal delay. After admission and several days of high dosage antibiotic treatment, Tyler got through the crisis, and eventually fully recovered. (He has gone on to have a highly successful career in transportation and infrastructure policy.)

This brush with tragedy deepened Richard's sense of gratitude and was a factor in his development of a strong commitment to community service. Soon after leading the establishment of the Holland & Knight office in Northern Virginia in 1997, Richard became active in the Northern Virginia Chamber of Commerce (then the Fairfax County Chamber). Within a short time, he also became a director in the Northern Virginia Community Foundation (now the Community Foundation for Northern Virginia). Richard moved up the chain in both organizations, eventually serving as Chair of the Chamber from 2003-04 and as Chair of the Community Foundation for two years in



approximately 2008-10. As Board Chair for the Chamber, Richard was instrumental in establishing the GovCon Council and played a significant role with others in starting the GovCon awards, an event that has run for over 15 years. As Chair of the Community Foundation, Richard played an important role in increasing donor funds, establishing a fund to help Military Personnel, Veterans and their Families, and in increasing the Foundation's impact by increasing grant amounts. Richard received significant awards from both organizations--The Community Leadership Award from the Community Foundation in 2014 (jointly awarded to Holland & Knight) and the Chamber's Lifetime Achievement Award in 2016.

In 2013, Richard joined the Board of the American Red Cross for the National Capital Region, an area with approximately 5.2 million people, including Northern Virginia, Montgomery

County and Prince Georges County, and the District of Columbia. After several years of service, Richard became Chair of the National Capital Region Red Cross Board in July 2016 and continues to serve in that position. Working with Linda Mathes, CEO of the American Red Cross for the National Capital Region, Richard has had an important role in expanding the Board, raising money for the Red Cross, building relationships between the Red Cross and business organizations, initiating an annual Disaster Summit program, and furthering the mission of Service to the Armed Forces. The American Red Cross for the National Capital Region, with significant involvement of its board, has raised approximately \$15.0 million in revenue on average for the four years ending June 30, 2019.

Finally, Richard has served as a member of the Board of the Virginia Chamber, for a total of approximately 7 years—for a period in 2005-08, and then from approximately 2016 to the present.

In private law practice Richard succeeded both as a practicing lawyer and as a firm builder. Following law school graduation from UVA in 1967, and service in the U.S. Navy JAG Corps, he returned to Washington, D.C. in late 1970, and became an associate in Pierson, Ball & Dowd, a firm that has since been acquired by Reed Smith. After only two years of practice, Richard at age 30 co-founded Dunnells & Duvall, aka Dunnells Duvall Bennett & Porter. Over a twenty-year period the firm grew from two to over sixty lawyers, and practiced in the areas of Litigation (White Collar and Civil), Government Contracts, Real Estate and Tax. However, in 1990 the firm lost most of its White Collar practice to a major New York firm, and in 1993 half of its Real Estate practice moved to Arnold & Porter. The firm still had many talented lawyers but it was time to merge. Fortunately, Dunnells & Duvall and Holland & Knight found each other, and the two organizations joined forces in January 1994. Richard played a leading role in that process for D&D. The merger was highly successful and has stood the test of time. The D.C. office of Holland & Knight is the largest office in the firm.

Richard played an important firm building role for Holland & Knight's D.C. office from 1994-1997. During that time he recruited partners in the areas of Government Contracts, Corporate, Telecommunications, Litigation, Intellectual Property, Real Estate and International.

Richard then turned to Northern Virginia and led the founding and, for many years, the buildup of the firm's office—initially in Fairview Park and now in Tysons. The office grew to over 50 lawyers and focused on several interrelated practice areas: Government Contracts, Corporate (with M&A work focused on the Government Contracts industry), Litigation, White Collar, Real Estate Transactional, Land Use, and Private Wealth. It became one of the most productive offices in the firm.

During the period 2003 to 2008, Richard led Holland & Knight's firm wide Litigation Section. In this position he had financial responsibility to the firm for the performance of several hundred lawyers in practice groups around the country. The Litigation Section was then the largest among the firm's sections and had annual revenue budgets in the hundreds of millions dollar range.

Richard also served on the Holland & Knight Directors Committee from 1994-2002, and on the H&K Consulting Board for approximately two years.

From late 1970 through early 2018, when he retired from Holland & Knight, Richard handled government contracts matters and commercial litigation. In the Government Contracts arena, he was counsel in many bid protests, defended cases under the False Claims Act, handled contract disputes, and represented companies and persons in suspension/debarment matters. In commercial litigation he handled significant arbitration matters, contract disputes, fraud cases, and cases where owners of major real estate projects had claims for inverse taking or breach of lease.

When Richard retired from Holland & Knight in 2018 he formed Westchester Advisory Services, LLC. This consulting firm provides strategic advice and recruiting services to law firms and is a vehicle for Richard to provide advisory board services to government contractors.

Richard grew up in Montgomery County, Maryland, with his father, mother, maternal grandmother, and his older brother. "My father and mother were raised in small towns in Illinois and met at the University of Illinois," Richard explains about his family history. "After they graduated from college, they married in the late 20s and settled in Chicago. Fortunately, before the

Great Depression hit my dad had gotten a job at the American Stock Exchange. He was able to keep his day job and to get through law school at night. My mother did piece work as a commercial artist."

"Meanwhile, my maternal grandmother was in desperate straits. Her husband and two of her three children had died. She had lost nearly all of her assets in the Depression. My grandmother moved in with my mom and dad for what was advertised to be three weeks and turned out to be 30 years."

The expanded family lived in the Chicago area for most of the 1930s where Richard's older brother, Chuck, was born in 1936. In the late 30s, as a result of connections Richard's father had through his college fraternity, Sigma Chi, he got a job in Washington, D.C. with a new law firm that was established to represent radio stations. The founding partner had been the head of the Federal Radio Commission, the predecessor agency to the FCC. The family moved to Washington, DC, and rented an apartment in Silver Spring, Maryland. And it was into that home that Richard was born in 1942.

Richard's Dad's work at the law firm was interrupted by World War II. Mr. Duvall was accepted into the 90-day wonder officer program for the Navy and served in Navy Intelligence in Washington, D.C. for the duration. He then returned to law practice at the firm and was able to practice for another 27 years before he retired. As Richard explains, "my dad made enough money to support the family, put Chuck through Cornell University and the University of Rochester Medical School, and me through the University of Illinois and the University of Virginia Law School." Tragically, he contracted lung cancer within two months of retiring, and died within about 18 months at age 67.

Richard's mother lived until age 92 and was able to survive in the family home with resources from her husband's earnings. "He clearly was the bridge from near poverty to having a good chance to be successful," states Richard. "I constantly think of the sacrifices both my father and mother made to ensure my development and to provide opportunities. Both were kind and caring, and always thought of their children before themselves."

"My brother was a strong influence on my life," explains Richard. "Early in high school, I was about to run off the rails. He, in turn, was doing

well in pre-med at Cornell. I remember a key conversation—really an intervention by him, when he asked me if my ambition was to enlist in the Army after high school. My performance, it seemed, was consistent with that career path. The comment rang the bell, and I flipped the switch. My grades in the last two years were quite good; I scored well in tests and was elected President of the Senior Class at Bethesda Chevy Chase High School. Thereafter I did well in college and even better in Law School." But I could easily have fallen by the wayside but for the influence of my parents and brother."

Richard's own family is remarkable. His wife Donna, herself a lawyer by training, is running a construction and investment company in Alexandria that buys and fixes up houses and sells them. He has two children from his first marriage—Julianne and Tyler. Julianne is the Head of School of the Chesapeake Academy in Irvington, Virginia, a private K-8 school that is ranked among the top private schools in Eastern Virginia. Tyler was a partner with McKinsey following service as Assistant Secretary for Transportation Policy at the U.S. Department of Transportation, and is now the CEO of a company that operates a toll road in the Austin, Texas area.

Richard and Donna have two children. Nicholas is a UVA Law graduate and a third-year corporate associate at Gibson Dunn & Crutcher LLP in Washington, D.C. Their daughter, Jackie, holds a bachelor's and master's degree in education from UVA and is on maternity leave as an elementary teacher in the Alexandria, Virginia school system. Richard has six grandchildren.

It's no surprise that Richard considers his leadership style to be service-driven. "In the early stages of my career, I was pretty hard charging and decisive," explains Richard, "but with insufficiently developed listening skills. At some point with more experience and maturity I came to understand that true leadership is not primarily about commanding and controlling; it's about making good decisions with input from stakeholders, setting an example worthy of being followed, being trustworthy and helping others in their efforts to serve and succeed."

To young people graduating college today, Richard advises focusing on providing service and being grateful—not entitled. "Consider how you can help other people without expecting something in return, versus how somebody can do

something for you,” emphasizes Richard. “Starting to live your life like that changes your interactions, changes how you feel about things. It changes what you value.”

As for material things Richard values, he mentions two items close to his heart: a painting by his brother of the mountains in Maine near where the two used to attend summer camp, and a photo of his golden retriever Chester. “My wife Donna gave me Chester about 11 years ago when he was a pup,” explains Richard. “The photo shows Chester in front of the Williams College Office of Admissions. When my older kids were looking at colleges, I could not get them to get out of the car at Williams; a few years ago, when traveling in New England with Chester, he happily posed. These two items, especially, trigger so many wonderful memories for which I am deeply grateful.”

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– By Gordon J. Bernhardt, CFP®, AIF®

*About Gordon J. Bernhardt*

*President and founder of Bernhardt Wealth Management and author of Profiles in Success: Inspiration from Executive Leaders in the Washington D.C. Area, Gordon provides financial planning and wealth management services to affluent individuals, families and business-owners throughout the Washington, DC area. Since establishing his firm in 1994, he and his team have been focused on providing high-quality service and independent financial advice to help clients make informed decisions about their money. For more information, visit [www.BernhardtWealth.com](http://www.BernhardtWealth.com) and [Gordon's Blog](#).*

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