

## Gafford remembered for contributions to Cal Western

By **LYLE MORAN**, The Daily Transcript  
Tuesday, December 23, 2014

George N. Gafford played a leading role in helping California Western School of Law secure independence from its parent university in the mid-1970s.

In the years after, Gafford served with distinction as a member of the faculty and later the board of trustees as the school grew and improved.

California Western officials said Gafford, who died of natural causes earlier this month at age 98, will long be remembered for his work over the past four-plus decades to help the law school thrive.

“The school lost a great friend when George passed away,” said Roy M. Bell, a veteran member of the board of trustees.

Gafford moved from Ohio to San Diego in 1969 to join the school’s full-time faculty as a professor, and he helped the school move from its Point Loma campus downtown in the early 1970s.

At the time, the school was in rough financial shape and at risk of losing accreditation. Gafford drew on his business-acquisition experience to suggest the law school buy its independence from United States International University.

He then helped negotiate the purchase agreement in which the school took on the university’s law-school-related debts.

California Western gained its independence in 1975.

Niels Schaumann, the school’s dean, said the agreement that Gafford saw to fruition was essential to the school’s future.

“My understanding is it was a matter of life and death for the school at the time because the parent university was on hard times financially,” Schaumann said. “If the breakaway had not happened, it could have been curtains for the law school.”

In an interview this year with California Western’s *Res Ipsa* magazine, Gafford said the school’s move to independence paved the way for its success.

“We’ve been able shape our own destiny, to make improvements and to innovate without having to get



George N. Gafford

*Photo Courtesy of California Western School of Law*

approval from a university senate or three layers of academic bureaucracy,” Gafford said at the time.

While at California Western, Gafford also helped launch team competitions, such as the moot court contests.

He coached the law school’s jury trial, appellate moot court, patent court and client counseling teams, achieving three national championships.

In recognition of his founding role in the competitions, the moot courtroom is named after him, as is the school’s intramural trial competition.

Schaumann said the competitions were very important to Gafford because of his support for practice-focused education.

The teams’ successes have helped California Western spread the word about the school, he said.

“The competitions were consistent with George’s view that legal education did not need to do more in terms of academic skills, but should do more in the professional skills department,” Schaumann said.

Gafford retired from the faculty in 1986, but his commitment to California Western was far from over. He served on its board of trustees for 25 years into his 90s, and served as chairman.

Kathryn “Casey” Bolinger, one of Gafford’s four stepchildren, said Gafford loved the school and was thrilled to stay involved after he retired.

“He cared deeply about the people there and it became his home,” she said, recalling instances when former students would come over to talk to Gafford in restaurants.

“His name will remain tied for the law school for years to come and it is only appropriate,” Bolinger said.

Schaumann said Gafford was one of the first people to befriend him when he arrived at the law school in 2012. The two bonded instantly and would often grab lunch together.

“He was very warm and very sharp,” Schaumann said.

Gafford, a professor emeritus, was a productive board member who provided great insights on many topics, Bell said.

Bell, who met Gafford in the early 1970s when Bell was a student at the school, said he was a mentor to many students.

“The greatest gift you can give is to guide people’s lives and careers, and George did that,” Bell said.

Gafford wrote a history of California Western, “Odyssey of a Law School,” the first of four books he published.

He was born in Cleveland. Gafford received a full scholarship to Yale University, helping the school win a fencing championship and graduating cum laude in 1936.

He qualified as a member of the U.S. Olympic fencing squad, but was unable to pay for the travel to Europe to compete.

Gafford later attended Case Western Reserve University School of Law, graduating first in his class.

After law school, Gafford worked for the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission, where he handled civil and criminal investigations, civil federal litigation, and was special assistant to the U.S. Attorney for criminal litigation.

He joined the U.S. Army Air Corps as a civilian in 1942, and later joined the U.S. Navy for active duty from 1942 to 1946.

After World War II, Gafford returned to Ohio, where he practiced law for 23 years. He served as an assistant attorney general of Ohio and was an adjunct professor at several colleges.

He moved to San Diego in 1969 to continue teaching and so he could play tennis year-round. Besides his service to California Western, Gafford also served on the boards of La Jolla Playhouse, San Diego Symphony Pops and Mainly Mozart.

Bolinger said he remained curious and interested in the world around him up until his passing. Recently, Gafford had Bolinger's husband take him to IHOP restaurant and then to the Embarcadero to see how it had changed.

Gafford is survived by his wife of 34 years, Martha A. Gafford. In addition to Bolinger, he leaves behind two other stepchildren.

Memorial donations may be made to the George N. Gafford Moot Court Fund at California Western or the San Diego Symphony.