

L. Neil Williams
1936 - 2012



"Giving - whether of financial resources or creative assistance in other ways - inevitably is animated by an interest in others, by a deep and sustaining belief that problems can be solved, good can be accomplished. That's optimism."

Neil Williams was a leading Atlanta lawyer, corporate director, advocate for arts and education, and mentor for both young lawyers and older executives.

His life of service and leadership, fueled by a hearty zest and optimism, sound judgment, and commitment to excellence in a common purpose, had a regional and national impact that was both far-ranging and deep. Born on March 22, 1936, to Thelma and Neil Williams, Sr. in Charlotte, North Carolina, he attended public schools there where he met his wife Sue.

He earned a Bachelor of Arts degree from Duke University with distinction in history and membership in Phi Beta Kappa in 1958. He received his J. D. degree from Duke Law School in 1961. That summer, Neil and Sue moved to Atlanta where Neil began his distinguished, thirty-eight year legal career with the firm of Alston & Bird LLP. In the legal profession, he rose rapidly in a practice that focused on business law, particularly corporate finance and mergers and acquisitions. He was an acknowledged leader in the profession, a trusted confidante to clients, and the law firm leader who built Alston & Bird from an important Atlanta law firm into regional and then national preeminence. When he retired from Alston & Bird, Neil became the first General Counsel of Invesco, one of the world's largest independent global investment management firms. Neil served as a corporate director at a number of companies, including the Attorneys Liability Assurance Society, an insurer of many of the largest U. S. law firms. At the time of his death, Neil was a respected director of Printpack, Inc., Acuity Brands, Inc., and Invesco Mortgage Capital, Inc.

He participated fully in the Atlanta community with particular interest in the arts. He and Sue sang in the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra Chorus under the direction of

Robert Shaw. He was a long-time member of the Board of Directors of the Symphony and chairman of that Board from 1987-1990. From 2002-2008 he served as Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the Woodruff Arts Center, which awarded him its first Lifetime Achievement Award on the occasion of its 40th anniversary. The Atlanta Chapter of the American Jewish Committee in 2006 presented him the Learned Hand Award in recognition of his contribution to the legal profession and the broader community.

Nationally, Neil served as a member of the Mountain Conservation Trust in Jasper, Georgia, and the Board of Directors of the Brevard Music Center in North Carolina, where he had earlier studied string bass for six summers. In 2010 Brevard honored him with its Distinguished Alumni Award. During the 1990s he was an active member of the Directors of the American Symphony Orchestra League and served as its chair for five years.

Neil felt great loyalty to his alma mater and worked enthusiastically for Duke University. He chaired the alumni associations of Duke Law School and Duke University. From 1980-1993 he was a member of Duke's Board of Trustees and Chairman from 1983-1988 and founding director of the Duke Management Company, serving until 1997. Duke University awarded him its Distinguished Alumni Award in 1990, and the Law School awarded him the Charles Rhyne Award of leadership in the legal profession in 1993.

Neil's work with philanthropic foundations included serving for years as a Trustee and Chair of The Duke Endowment, which serves needs in North and South Carolina, Chair of the Vasser Woolley Foundation in Atlanta and Trustee of the Halle Foundation in Atlanta, and trustee member of the investment committee of the Presbyterian Church Foundation in Louisville. He was an active member and trustee of Trinity Presbyterian Church in Atlanta.

He was the proud father of Fred Williams and Susan Williams and grandfather of Taylor Williams and Alex Jacobson.