

## **Don M. Stichter**

***December 29, 1929 – January 19, 2019***

We are saddened to lose Don. M. Stichter, one of the founders and the first president of the TBBBA, who suffered a fatal heart attack while- typical of Don and in true Navy Seal (UDT) tradition - swimming laps on January 19, 2019.

Don was widely recognized as one of the finest lawyers in the State of Florida, and he practiced law not only with excellence but also with the highest degree of professionalism. A 2005 Cramdown article authored by Tim Corcoran referred to him as the "Dean" of the Tampa bankruptcy bar.

Don always maintained his keen sense of humor and remained unflappable and calm during the legal firestorms that attend his busy, high-stakes practice. He was a skilled trial lawyer and tried many high profile cases while acting as chief of the United States Attorneys Office in Tampa. He then went into private practice and handled virtually every type of case, ranging from divorces to probates to writing title insurance to civil litigation to traffic court to forming corporations, while finding time to serve as the President of the Hillsborough County Bar Association.

He began to specialize in bankruptcy cases in 1979 and handled all varieties of cases during the 1980s until the end of the decade, when he filed the \$3 billion Hillsborough Holdings case and thereafter was primarily involved in large chapter 11 cases. Don was the first recipient of the McClurg Award, the highest honor of the TBBBA. In 1992, Don became one of the first three lawyers in Florida to be selected as a Fellow of the American College of Bankruptcy. In 2002, he was named the outstanding lawyer for that year by the Hillsborough County Bar Association and in 2015 became the second recipient of the Thirteenth Judicial Circuit Professionalism Award, which was presented by Judges Williamson and McEwen based upon his consistent demonstration of "honesty, integrity, fairness, courtesy, and . . . professionalism."

Don founded Stichter & Riedel, P.A., now Stichter, Riedel, Blain and Postler, P.A., in 1974 and managed or co-managed the firm for more than forty years. One of his sons, Scott, a partner in SRBP, also served as president of the TBBBA - the only father-son duo in TBBBA history. Don's legal skill resulted in his being listed in numerous peer review ratings services, including Best Lawyers in America, Chambers Leading Lawyers for Business, Super Lawyers, Who's Who in Insolvency Law, Expert Guides, Florida Trend Magazine's listing of Florida Legal Elite, and Martindale Hubbell (AV).

He was deeply committed to the pro bono delivery of legal services to the needy and served in various capacities on the board of Bay Area Legal Services, which honored him as the fourth recipient of its highest award, the Judge Don Castor Award, in 2012. His example and guidance were instrumental in the Florida Supreme Court's selection of the firm in 2014 as the outstanding firm in the state for its contributions to the delivery of legal services to the poor. The high level of professionalism in the bankruptcy bar in the Tampa Bay area is a direct legacy of Don's career and example.

### **From his obituary:**

Don Mason Stichter, 89, of Tampa FL, died of a heart attack on January 19, 2019 in Tampa. Don was born in Toledo, OH on 29 December 1929 to Wayne and Irene Stichter and was the second of four boys.

Don attended Colgate University, where he was a member of the Phi Gamma Delta fraternity, the college swim team and the Colgate Thirteen, an a cappella singing group.

After graduation, Don spent the summer packing pineapples in Hawaii, and kicked off a lifetime love of sailing by volunteering to crew aboard a sailboat headed back to California. A call from the Navy took him to Newport, RI for Officer Candidate School, and in service aboard a transport ship between California and Japan. Not content to spend the rest of his enlistment period riding on a ship, Don entered the seventh class of the Navy's Underwater Demolition Team (precursors to the Navy SEALs), where he—in addition to his Navy duties—captured lobster and abalone, and established life-long friendships and a love of scuba diving.

After leaving the Navy, Don followed his father's footsteps into the field of law. While law school at the University of Wisconsin started his passion for the law, it was in Madison where he found his love in life, meeting Ellen, his wife of fifty-nine years.

After two years in Washington DC with the US Justice Department's Antitrust division, an opening with the United States Attorney's office brought Don to Tampa in 1959 for what he thought would be a two-year stay. Instead, he went into private practice in Tampa and founded a boutique law firm that became one of the most prominent bankruptcy firms in Florida.

Don received many local and national accolades; he was one of the first lawyers in Florida to be inducted in the American College of Bankruptcy, named as outstanding lawyer by the Hillsborough County Bar Association, and the initial recipient of the Tampa Bay Bankruptcy Bar Association's Doug McClurg Award (recognizing professionalism and civility). Throughout his career, Don excelled at and most enjoyed mentoring young lawyers.

Don loved music. Since learning to play the baritone at 9 years old, there was not a time music was not an important part of his life. He owned and played a wide range of brass instruments, at home and as part of Tampa music groups including the Old Smoothies and as a member of the Tampa Community Band for over 20 years. He sang barbershop with the groups in Alexandria VA (Alexandria Harmonizers) and Tampa. In recent years, Don took great pleasure in playing his baritone for the Friday lunch crowd at Faith Café.

Don enjoyed all manner of sports, including sailing, golf, and tennis. Swimming was his lifelong favorite. Don was a fixture at the Palma Ceia pool, rarely missing a day, even in the coldest weather. It was only the heart attack that kept him from completing his full swimming workout on his final day. The gospel of Matthew instructs us to lay up for ourselves treasures in heaven, and Matthew 6:21 states that, "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." Don's treasure was not in material possessions or in earthly accolades and successes, although they were plentiful, but rather the eternal and lasting treasures of his faith, family, and friends. Don was a member of Palma Ceia Methodist Church for almost 60 years and taught Sunday School classes there in the 1960s and early 1970s. Don's legacy includes an adoring family and numerous friendships that span decades. Don is survived by his wife Ellen Stevens Stichter; four children, Lynn Tate (David) of Charlotte NC, Scott Stichter (Sarah) of Tampa FL, Steven Stichter (Mark Ewert) of Washington DC, and Kim Branagan (Brian) of Tampa; six grandchildren Mary Ellen Pearce, Arlie Pearce, Mason Stichter, Reese Stichter, Brian "Tripp" Branagan III, and Andrew "Drew" Branagan; and his brother Philip Stichter of Columbus OH. He was pre-deceased by his brothers, Richard and John Stichter.