

Lewis M. Schott, 1922-2017

Universities live for true believers like Lewis Schott. These paragons of commitment and generosity occupy a permanent and cherished place in our institutional memory, for their engagement reflects not only a belief in the value and purpose of our programs and people, but also a recognition that building a quality place requires a sustained participation that outlasts the times of university presidents and trustees.

Lewis Schott was, in the terms of the faithful, one great Gator. He proclaimed it to the world with his majestic, classic 1965 Rolls Royce proudly sporting its Gator license plate. His endless unquenchable enthusiasm for Gator sports and its variable performance over time kept him tuned in to the Gator Nation beyond anything we ordinary mortals could achieve. His legendary focus on the fortunes of the Gators and his admiration for the achievements and style of the 2005-2007 championship basketball teams inspired him to acquire the hardwood floor from the second championship in Atlanta and let the Athletic Association cut it into pieces that the Gator faithful could buy in support of scholarships. As some of you may know, a large panel from that floor was fixed to a wall in the hallway, and the players would touch it as they ran into the arena in Gainesville as an inspiration for the qualities of sportsmanship and performance Lewis expected of them.

Lewis had a style that left us always wanting to stay longer. We would come to wherever he was, perhaps after a substantial absence, to thank him for one of his many gifts or describe for him another opportunity, and he would receive us as if we had just seen each other yesterday and he was unreservedly pleased to see us again today. His legendary charm put us at ease, welcomed us to a conversation at a casual breakfast, lunch, or dinner, and turned quickly to the rising fortunes of the University of Florida.

As if he had just left campus yesterday, he asked about its people—students, faculty, and staff. He wanted to hear about the success of new programs and the changing landscape of American higher education. If we asked, he'd tell us about his current projects and interests, sometimes reminiscing about the various distinguished careers of his life in that wide array of enterprises and activities that marked him as a superb business leader, wise in the ways of America's turbulent economic environment. If we were lucky, we'd get a ride in that famous Gator Rolls.

As we traveled around meeting periodically with friends of the University of Florida, a trip to New York or then to Florida to meet with Lewis was like traveling to an oasis of positive energy, warm welcome, and clear eyed wisdom. A breakfast with Lewis in the old New York Pan Am building rooftop restaurant or later in one of his favorite places in Palm Beach, always left us re-energized for the days and weeks ahead.

That charming gracious style, easy smile, and winning personality detracted nothing from the clear-eyed understanding Lewis brought to every substantive conversation. He would ask questions with a light touch, but questions that went to the heart of the matter under discussion, questions that let you know he knew what mattered. This of course did not surprise us exactly since Lewis' biography identified him as one of those rare savants whose magic transforms whatever he touches into a success, whether in law, business, civic development, or philanthropy.

He surely loved his university, and his designation as a UF Distinguished Alumnus in so many ways helped define the best aspects of the Gator faithful. Many of us benefited from his generous spirit, for his sense of philanthropy reached across the spectrum from student scholarships to academic centers and included major support for basic and clinical research in the medical sciences. For an example, we need only recognize the endowment of the university's first Super Chair, the Eminent Scholar chair in honor of Marcia Whitney Schott in the field of rheumatoid arthritis, a gift that recognized the importance of acquiring the superb faculty that signal institutional distinction. Among his many other gifts he endowed the Marshall M. Criser Distinguished Lecture Series in the College of Law and supported the construction of the President's new home in Gainesville.

For all the institutional significance of his contributions to the university's work and activities, Lewis was inspired by people, individuals who needed his help and whose work he appreciated. For all his stellar accomplishments, and a resume that leaves us in awe, Lewis was a wonderful friend, wise as an advisor, and steadfast in his beliefs.

It is a permanent privilege to have had Lewis as a friend.

Thank You.

John V. Lombardi, February 2017