

BARRISTER

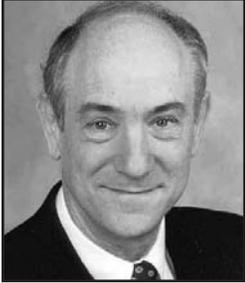
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ALUMNI PROFILES



Bennett Brummer, AB '62, JD '65, is arguably the ultimate public servant. While many people choose careers in public interest, Brummer goes one step further. He has to run for office every four years just to keep his job. The Public Defender for Miami-Dade County, Brummer has been elected to this prominent position eight consecutive times. He was first elected

Public Defender in 1976, and his eighth term began in 2004. To Brummer, the choice is an obvious one. "I continue to [run for office] because it's the best job I could ever have and is the highest use for my license to practice law," he said.

During his time at the Law School, Brummer found encouragement and support in some of his professors, including Professors Thomas Wills and M. Minnette Massey. Brummer remembers Professor Wills for helping him keep his focus. "[He] had faith in my abilities and encouraged me to remain in law school at a time when I found my studies irrelevant," he recalled. In the community, Brummer recognizes former Public Defender Phillip A. Hubbart and Chief Judge Gerald T. Wetherington for modeling the values of leadership under the most challenging of circumstances.

Before beginning his career in public service, Brummer volunteered for two years in the United States Peace Corps in Venezuela. Although he may not have realized it at the time, his experience in Venezuela prepared him for what would become his lifelong career. "Service as a Peace Corps volunteer helped me better understand our American values, culture and foreign policy and how they are perceived by people outside of our country," he explained. "My Peace Corps experience also allowed me to develop some understanding of Latin American culture and fluency in Spanish, which have been of great benefit as an elected official in Miami."

As Public Defender, Brummer manages an office of approximately four hundred people, two hundred of whom are attorneys. Their job is to represent individuals whom a judge determines to be unable to afford a private attorney. The cases include criminal, juvenile, and mental health matters.

Brummer's commitment to his community is as strong as his devotion to his job. He has served in numerous organizations, including the Supreme Court's Appellate Advisory Committee, the Community Advisory Board of the University of Miami School of Medicine Center for Treatment Research on Adolescent Drug Abuse, the Miami Coalition for Care to the Homeless, and he has served three terms as president of the Florida Public Defender Association.

For Brummer, a lifelong career in public service is a calling. "Money is not my object," he explained. "I have always had a roof over my head and never missed a meal. I get great satisfaction from service to my clients, my staff and the public. My work has given me the opportunity to fight for civil rights and human rights," he said.

To students who may be hesitant to seek public interest legal work, Brummer offers the broader picture. "It is somewhat more

difficult today to go into public service," he said. "Public service does not get the respect it used to. But, it is still essential to a free and civilized society. There are many fine public servants who never get any recognition, but their work is no less important or rewarding than it has ever been."



Neal Sonnett, AB '64, JD '67. As a young teen, Neal Sonnett told his parents he wanted to drop out of school. It wasn't because he was lazy or a bad student, however. On the contrary, the New York City boy was already working as a child actor, and wanted to continue his run that included a Broadway production and a television soap opera role. Fortunately for the rest of society,

Mr. Sonnett's parents insisted on school, and although he continued acting, he ultimately decided his best role would be that of attorney.

Today, Mr. Sonnett is a nationally acclaimed criminal defense attorney. He's been named the 2007 Alumnus of Distinction by the University of Miami School of Law and is receiving the University of Miami Alumni Association's William R. Butler Community Service Award. The recognition piggybacks on dozens of other prominent awards recently, including the 2007 Fellows of the American Bar Foundation Outstanding Service Award and the 2006 Selig I. Goldin Memorial Award from the Criminal Law Section of The Florida Bar.

His pro bono work over his 40-year career, as well as his effort to help those who other attorneys preferred not to defend, earned him the informal title of "trial lawyer with a social conscience." Never afraid to take on a challenging case, he described his first trial when he was a green attorney just out of law school. "The victim of the case was unable to speak or hear and I had to examine him in direct," he said. "It was the same day I was sworn into the Bar. Talk about sink or swim. But the greatest thing about it was the fact that I was able to get right into the action right away."

Mr. Sonnett attributes his ability to jump into action to several factors. First, his acting experience, coupled with the fact that he was a nationally recognized debator in high school and college, made him a natural performer in the courtroom. Second, his win of a moot court session at the UM Law School introduced him to practicing attorneys, one who later offered him a job. And, third, clerking at the U.S. Attorney's office gave him the chance to observe trials and attorneys at work.

Attorneys who have known and worked with Mr. Sonnett for many years say he is an incredible individual. "I went to high school with Neal and from the moment I met him I knew he had the tremendous ability, even then, to defend his point of view," said Steve Zack, former president of The Florida Bar Association. "He was very thoughtful and today when you say Neal Sonnett, you immediately think of someone who is concerned about the little guy or gal and is not afraid to express his opinions. He is a man of conviction."