

The Best of the Best

Six more Longhorns buttoned up burnt-orange jackets this fall as they received the Texas Exes' highest honor — the Distinguished Alumnus Award. The newest winners include an oilman turned philanthropist, a trial lawyer with a renowned case record, an education activist with small-town roots and big-time generosity, a judge with eyes on the Supreme Court, an attorney who gives back to the communities he rose from, and an airline CEO who is loved by his employees *and* lets bags fly free.





DAVID BECK

LLB '65, Life Member

BEFORE DAVID BECK DECIDED to become a lawyer, he wanted to join the priesthood. He was set to head for the seminary when his parish priest convinced him to finish high school first.

"I met my wife, Judy, during my senior year and decided, well, maybe I don't have a vocation after all," Beck says.

Those who've faced him in the courtroom probably wish he had chosen the life of the cloth.

Beck is one of Texas' best trial lawyers — a courtroom preacher, a justice evangelical.

"You really have to preserve your integrity at all times," he says, "and I've always believed that in the cases that I try, I try to stake out the moral high ground because jurors invariably want to do what's right."

It was a long road to preeminence. Beck is the oldest of five children, the son of a refinery worker and a homemaker. After high school, he enrolled at nearby Lamar University so he could live at home and work side jobs to pay his way. To get the 12 miles from Port Arthur to Beaumont for class, he hitchhiked.

When Beck started at UT Law in 1962, he was struck by the many different backgrounds of his peers.

"That really made me realize how competitive life was," Beck says, "and how if you were going to succeed, you were really going to have to put forth substantial effort because the people you were competing against were very, very talented."

Compete he did. Beck made UT's moot court team and helped it win a national championship.

After graduating, he joined the firm of Fulbright & Jaworski in Houston. As a young associate, Beck was moved by Leon Jaworski's emphasis on service.

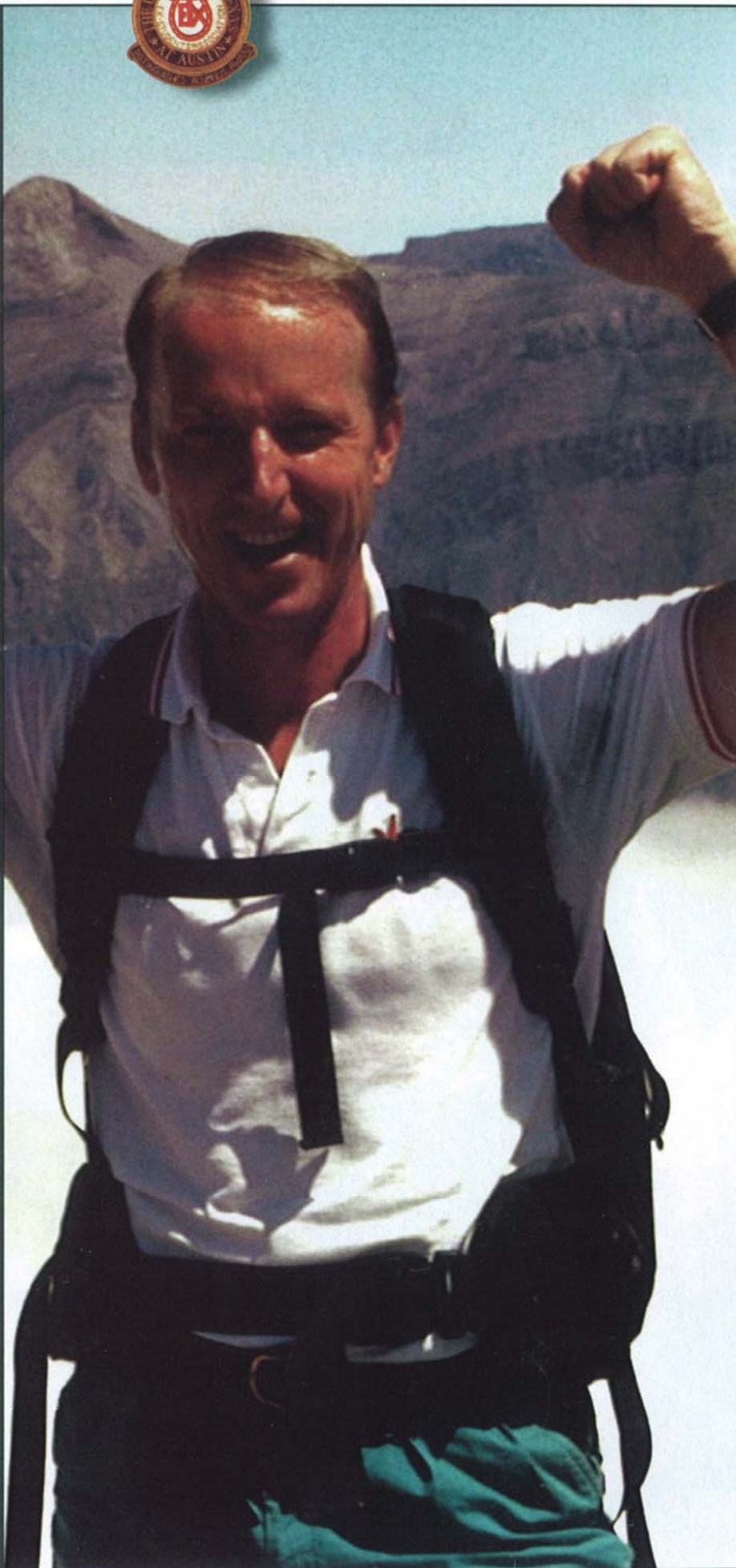
"He explained that that's really part of your obligation as a lawyer," Beck remembers. "That you've got to make your community better; you've got to make your profession better. I've always believed that. And so as a consequence, I've always tried to do both."

Beck went on to open his own firm and to serve as president of the state Bar of Texas, the American College of Trial Lawyers, and the UT Law School Foundation.

In 2009 he and Judy endowed a program at UT Law to emphasize legal writing.

"I enjoy what I do so much that I can't believe they pay us to do this kind of work," Beck says, "but they do. And without the University of Texas Law School, I wouldn't be doing what I am today."

—Tim Taliaferro



Courtesy David Beck