



LIFETIME ACHIEVERS 2019

WILLIAM LEE

## Paying It Forward

BY SAMANTHA STOKES

EARNING A LAW DEGREE OPENED UP A LIFETIME OF OPPORTUNITIES for Bill Lee.

"I grew up as a Chinese American at a time when it was a little difficult to be a Chinese American in the United States," says the former co-managing partner of Wilmer Cutler Pickering Hale and Dorr, who, in addition to being known as a law firm leader, seasoned intellectual property attorney and commercial litigator, is also a fellow of Harvard College and a lecturer at Harvard Law School.

At the beginning of his career, Lee says, "I had no idea any of these things were even possible." The Philadelphia-born attorney was raised in Boston after his parents left Shanghai for the United States in 1948. Lee went to Harvard and later earned business and law degrees from Cornell University and Cornell Law School, and he joined Hale and Dorr after graduating in 1976.

"The fact that [Hale and Dorr] gave me a chance when others didn't says a lot about the firm," he says. "That's why I've tried to pay it forward."

This ethos is evident to those who have worked with Lee during his 40-plus-year career. Beyond his private practice record, work on the Iran-Contra investigation, management of Hale and Dorr's merger with Wilmer Cutler & Pickering, and decades in academia, colleagues laud his enthusiasm to mentor up-and-coming attorneys without judgment.

"He sees developing the next generation of lawyers not as an obligation, but a privilege," says Susan Murley, Wilmer's co-managing partner, who has worked with Lee during her 30-plus years at the firm. "Everything, for Bill, is a teaching moment. He

takes time to step back, identify mistakes and use them as learning opportunities and ways to improve for next time."

Murley adds that Lee's mentorship is even more valuable given how talented of a lawyer he is: "He's always in the moment with the client. But at the same time, he never stops thinking about the next move on the chess board of litigation."

"There are few lawyers who have Bill's gift for seeing around the corners," she says.

Joe Mueller, an intellectual property partner at Wilmer who has worked with Lee for nearly 15 years, agrees that on top of learning from Lee directly, watching him work is a master class.

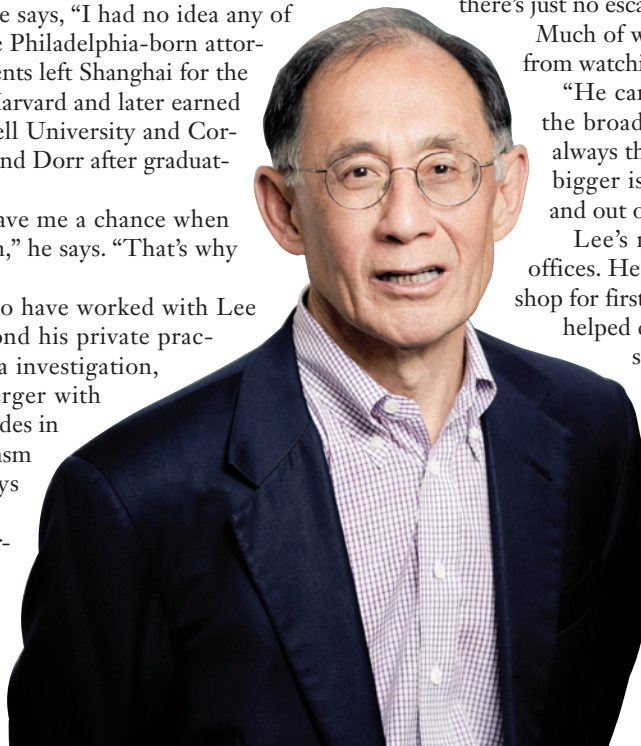
"His courtroom technique is flawless," Mueller says. "His cross-examination style is like a steel trap closing in on a witness, and there's just no escape."

Much of what Mueller has learned from Lee came from watching him in action.

"He can always locate particular issues within the broader matrix of the governing law, and he always thinks of how individual issues fit into the bigger issue, with all of its dimensions, both in and out of trial," Mueller says.

Lee's mentorship isn't confined to Wilmer's offices. He lectures in the Problem Solving Workshop for first-years at Harvard Law School, a class he helped develop more than a decade ago to teach students to exercise real-world judgment. Students develop oral, writing and listening skills and work in teams on case studies to exercise collaborative judgment.

"It's a lot of fun because you're reaching kids who are just entering law school, and it's a different set of skills from what the rest of law school is focused on," Lee says "[Teaching is] an opportunity to give back to the profession, and it's energizing to see the next generation of lawyers." ■



### WHAT ADVICE DO YOU HAVE FOR YOUNG ATTORNEYS?

"You shouldn't have a three-year plan or a five-year plan. A legal education and degree will provide you with an enormous number of opportunities: public sector, private sector, legal services, business, academia, government. You can't anticipate the opportunities that become available to you. Work as hard as you can to become the best possible lawyer you can be, a lawyer of integrity, and take advantage of the opportunities that will eventually come your way."