

# About Our Honoree...

## George H. Cohen, Esq.



Tonight The Peggy Browning Fund honors George H. Cohen, from the Washington, DC law firm of Bredhoff & Kaiser, where George practiced law for forty years.

George has had a remarkable life and a remarkable career. Born in Brooklyn, New York, in 1934, George received both his BA (1955) and law degree (1957) from Cornell University.

After graduation, George and his wife Phyllis moved to Washington, D.C. where he served as a Second Lieutenant in the U.S. Army and earned his LLM at Georgetown University Law School.

After graduation and the completion of his Army service, George began his career as a labor lawyer. He joined the National Labor Relations Board in 1960 as an Attorney Advisor for Board Member Brown where he helped shape the progressive, union and worker friendly agenda of the “Kennedy Board.” In 1963 George moved to the Appellate Court Branch of the Board’s General Counsel’s Office where he defended the fruits of the Board’s agenda in the Courts of Appeal.

In 1966, George left the Board to begin his 40 year stint as a union-side labor lawyer. George joined what has now become the nationally known, 30 lawyer firm of Bredhoff & Kaiser, but was then just a handful of lawyers who primarily represented the United Steel Workers of America. In 1976, George argued and won the first of his five Supreme Court cases, Buffalo Forge v. USWA, which protected the sympathy strike from judicial injunctions. His four other Supreme Court arguments include cases that defined the nature of collective bargaining obligations (H.K. Porter v. NLRB), insured meaningful worker protection under OSHA (American

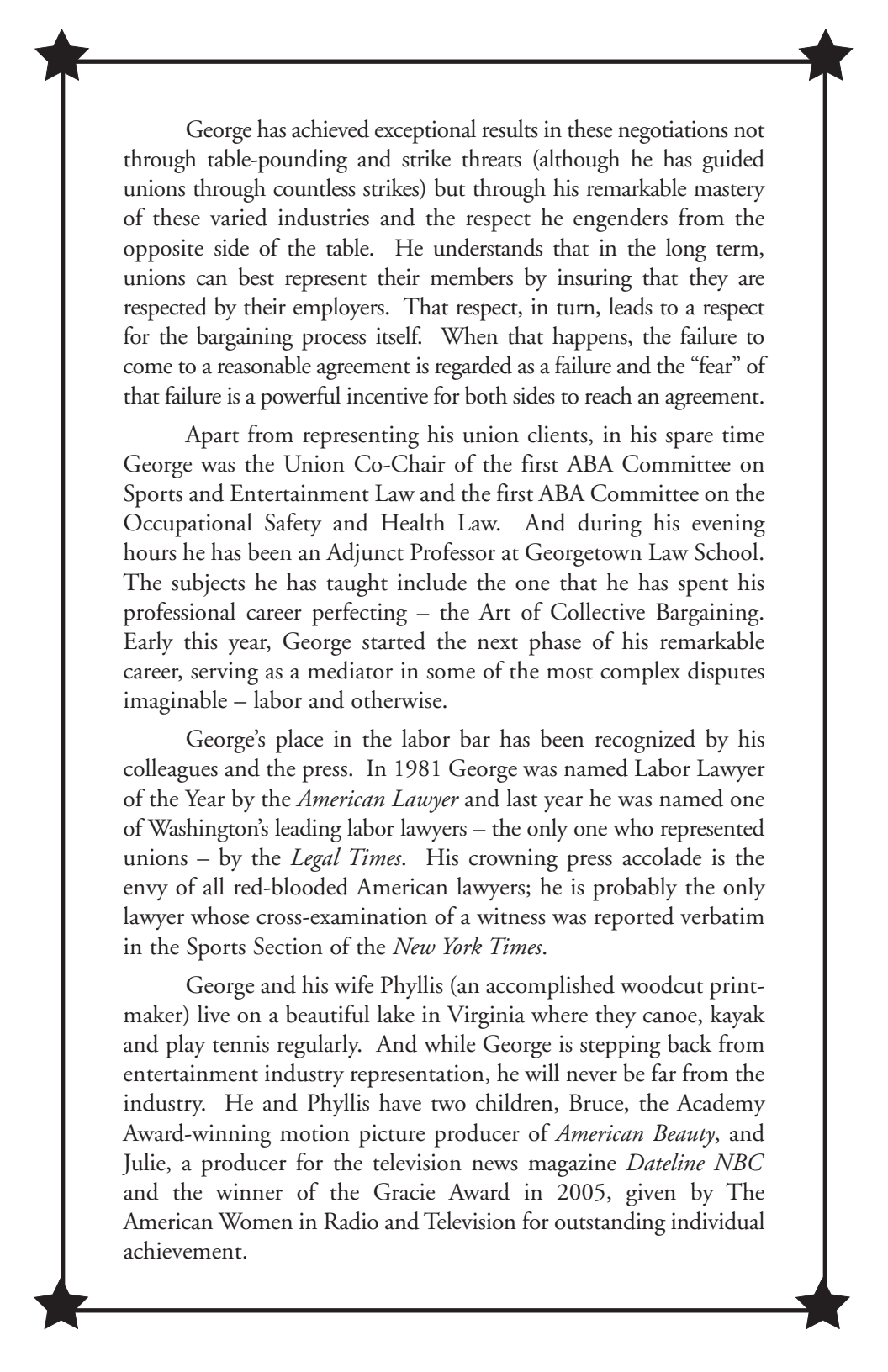
Textile Manufacturers Assn. v. Donovan - the Cotton Dust case – and IUD v. American Petroleum Institute – the Benzene standards case), and properly assigned the responsibility for maintaining a safe workplace to employers and not unions (USWA v. Rawson).

George's interest in health and safety issues and his judicial successes lead to his becoming a member of the Advisory Council for Environmental Health at Johns Hopkins University School of Hygiene and Public Health and made him the “go to” lawyer for the labor movement in the most difficult and important cases on that issue.

In addition to George's Supreme Court victories and lower court successes in cases involving health and safety issues, George has briefed and argued over 100 cases in Federal and state appellate courts all over the country and served as a Member of the Advisory Committee for the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit.

George has not just been an appellate court lawyer. He has negotiated, or provided legal support for negotiations, in literally dozens of collective bargaining agreements in industries as diverse as public education (George was instrumental in bringing the bargaining process to Virginia teachers), the rail industry, and the sports (basketball, baseball and hockey) and the entertainment industries. His entertainment industry representation has included work on some of the most complex issues faced by the sports unions as well as the Directors Guild, the Screen Actors Guild and AFTRA.

In 1989 George was named General Counsel of the American Federation of Musicians and in that capacity he became the chief negotiator in five major rounds of bargaining with the motion picture industry, the recording industry, the television networks, the traveling Broadway musical industry and the advertising industry. At the local level, George negotiated agreements with the National Symphony Orchestra, the St. Louis Symphony Orchestra and the Detroit Philharmonic Orchestra. Within the last several months, George brought to closure a ground-breaking AFM recording agreement with a multi-employer group of symphony orchestras from all over the country. His work with the AFM also included representing its two residual funds – one for motion picture residuals and the other for record (later cassette and now digital) residuals.



George has achieved exceptional results in these negotiations not through table-pounding and strike threats (although he has guided unions through countless strikes) but through his remarkable mastery of these varied industries and the respect he engenders from the opposite side of the table. He understands that in the long term, unions can best represent their members by insuring that they are respected by their employers. That respect, in turn, leads to a respect for the bargaining process itself. When that happens, the failure to come to a reasonable agreement is regarded as a failure and the “fear” of that failure is a powerful incentive for both sides to reach an agreement.

Apart from representing his union clients, in his spare time George was the Union Co-Chair of the first ABA Committee on Sports and Entertainment Law and the first ABA Committee on the Occupational Safety and Health Law. And during his evening hours he has been an Adjunct Professor at Georgetown Law School. The subjects he has taught include the one that he has spent his professional career perfecting – the Art of Collective Bargaining. Early this year, George started the next phase of his remarkable career, serving as a mediator in some of the most complex disputes imaginable – labor and otherwise.

George’s place in the labor bar has been recognized by his colleagues and the press. In 1981 George was named Labor Lawyer of the Year by the *American Lawyer* and last year he was named one of Washington’s leading labor lawyers – the only one who represented unions – by the *Legal Times*. His crowning press accolade is the envy of all red-blooded American lawyers; he is probably the only lawyer whose cross-examination of a witness was reported verbatim in the Sports Section of the *New York Times*.

George and his wife Phyllis (an accomplished woodcut print-maker) live on a beautiful lake in Virginia where they canoe, kayak and play tennis regularly. And while George is stepping back from entertainment industry representation, he will never be far from the industry. He and Phyllis have two children, Bruce, the Academy Award-winning motion picture producer of *American Beauty*, and Julie, a producer for the television news magazine *Dateline NBC* and the winner of the Gracie Award in 2005, given by The American Women in Radio and Television for outstanding individual achievement.