



H. Lee Godfrey, 1939-2025

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With very heavy hearts, the partners of Susman Godfrey announce the passing of H. Lee Godfrey, a founder of our firm. Lee died on June 2nd after a long illness.

Lee was one of the preeminent trial lawyers of his generation. His smile and wit charmed judges and jurors; his keen intellect persuaded them. Lee's cross examinations were legendary, an iron fist in a velvet glove.



The most sophisticated clients in the world trusted Lee to handle their cases. From representing Northrup over an aborted sale of F-18 fighter jets, to the Gulf pension holders aggrieved at the invasion of their pension fund, to the shareholders of American Shell Oil Company opposing Royal Dutch Shell's going-private transaction, to mineral rights holders pursuing antitrust claims over oil royalties – Lee litigated some of the most important matters in the firm's history. Even Evel Knievel wanted Lee to be his lawyer.

To paraphrase the Texas saying, Lee wasn't present when our law firm was born, but he got here as quickly as he could. In 1982, Lee joined the small litigation boutique that his friend Steve Susman had recently launched. Lee and Steve built Susman Godfrey into a litigation powerhouse and one of the top firms in the country. Their management styles were completely different but somehow complemented each other perfectly, perhaps because they were also best friends.

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A generation of Susman Godfrey trial lawyers owe their courtroom swagger and understanding of human nature to the lessons Lee taught them in and out of the courtroom, usually flavored with his legendary sense of humor. Lee was quick with a smile and an encouraging word for every member of his trial teams, regardless of their role or tenure. Very few law school recruits could resist a pitch from the elegant, fun-loving, and dashing Lee Godfrey. And very few clients and lawyers, whether adversaries or allies, could resist his charisma and his combination of small-town, plain-spoken charm and megawatt intelligence.

As much pleasure as Lee took in trying cases, he loved carrying on with family and friends long after the sun had gone down. Lawyers at the firm and outside of it, including life-long friends Joe Jamail, Harry Reasoner, and Robin Gibbs spent countless hours enjoying Lee's repartee—usually accompanied by an outrageous meal and a few bottles of blindingly extravagant French wine. When he was in London, Lee drank “The Godfrey,” a drink named after him at the Lanesborough Hotel's Library Bar. Not bad for a kid from Palestine, Texas. President Clinton nominated Lee to be the ambassador to Brazil in 1996, but Lee eventually turned down the post because he realized that even Carnival in Rio was no match for the fun he had every day with us at the firm.



We are profoundly sad that Lee has reached the end of this journey, but we remain deeply grateful to have had him as our partner, mentor and friend. We, his law firm family, mourn Lee's passing and extend our condolences to his beloved wife Sandy, their daughter and our Susman Godfrey partner Lindsey Godfrey Eccles, her husband Matt, and Sandy and Lee's three grandchildren, Thomas Lee, Isabella, and Tudor.