

Oldest living former Washington County Attorney, 91-year-old Charlie Pickett, class of 1938, will be honored at Homecoming as Dixie's Distinguished Alumni

The one thing they all have in common is the foundation that Dixie provided for their later achievements

DIXIE'S JUDICIAL ALUMNI

Story by Diana Ireland Stanley, '09

Over 100 years ago, the citizens of Washington County elected their first county attorney. Since that time 20 men have served as the county's chief legal officer, and Dixie State College is proud to count ten of those men as alumni.

He's not your typical 91-year-old. He recalls details like an encyclopedia, and the mischief in his eyes calls up images of Dennis the Menace. With a buoyant step and a quick laugh, Charles M. Pickett ('38), looks and sounds like a man 20 years his junior. Standing in front of the stately old pioneer courthouse on St. George Blvd., he points to the windows by the balcony on the top floor where he prosecuted cases during his tenure as Washington County Attorney.

Today Pickett is the oldest living former Washington County Attorney, and he carries the additional distinction of being the only living member of Dixie's original football team. Playing in a farmer's field near the Virgin River in Bunkerville, Nevada in 1937, Pickett scored the first-ever touchdown in Dixie's first-ever football game.

The confidence and drive required to score that first touchdown served him well in years to come as the county's chief legal officer, when he prosecuted murder trials and conducted civil litigations.

In the years since Pickett's service, Washington County has grown exponentially,

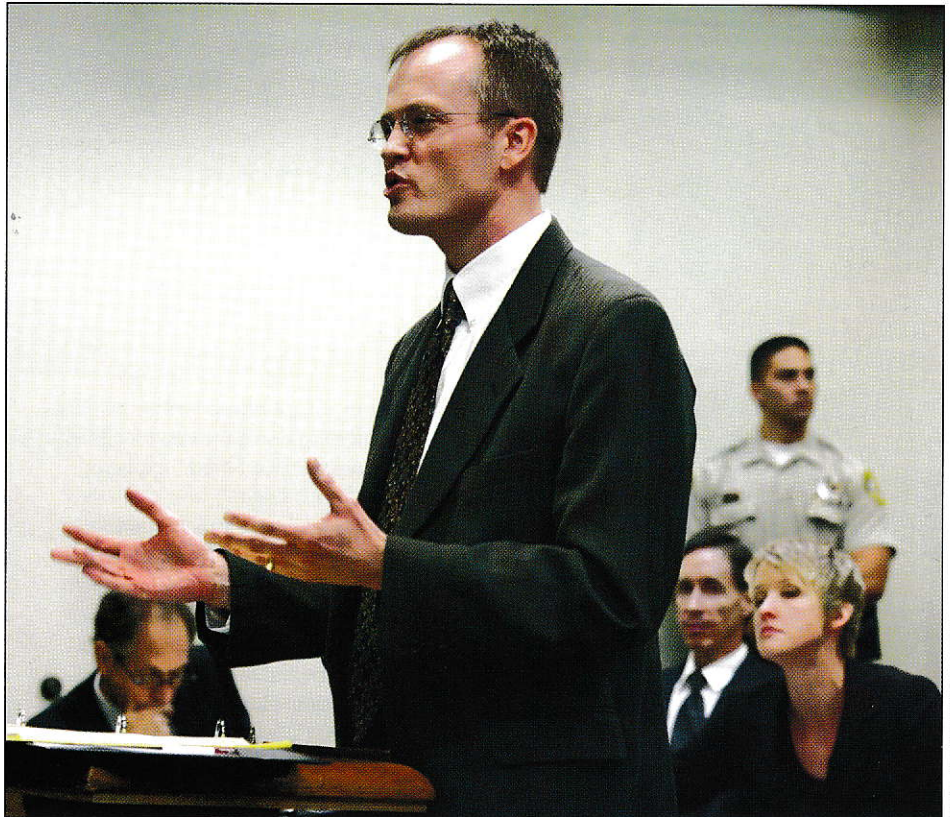


Photo courtesy Cetty Images

Brock Belnap, current county attorney, recently prosecuted one of the most intriguing, high profile cases ever tried in Washington County, which involved polygamist Warren Jeffs.

and so have the duties of its county attorney. While Pickett gives colorful renditions of his many legal adventures, one of the highest profile cases ever prosecuted in the county made headlines only recently. Brock Belnap ('87), current Washington County Attorney and former Dixie College student body president, successfully tried polygamist Warren Jeffs. With his legal team, Belnap secured convictions on two felony counts for the leader of the Fundamentalist Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The charges stemmed from an FLDS church-sanctioned marriage Jeffs conducted in 2001 between a 14-year-old girl and her 19-year-old cousin. Belnap's team not only dealt with the legal aspects of the complicated case, but an unprecedented level of publicity brought

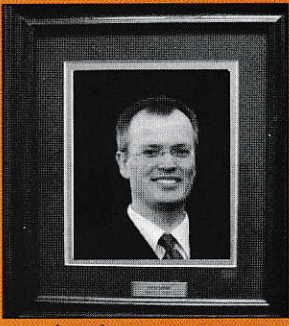
by dozens of reporters who converged on St. George.

"The media onslaught made it surreal," says Belnap. "We had to attend to the bizarre whirlwind of media attention, which included being mobbed by reporters every time we walked to the courthouse. It took almost as much time, energy and stress to handle the media as it did to prosecute the case."

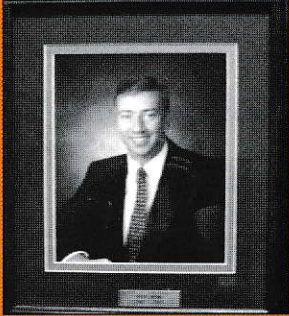
Three hundred potential jurors were initially summoned for Jeffs' trial that eventually lasted nearly four weeks. Complications such as jury misconduct, a change of venue controversy and possible mistrial added to the tense drama of the case.

"It was unlike any other case I've ever

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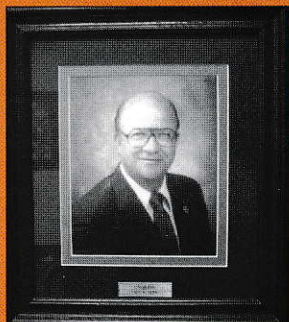
Brock Belnap: 2003 - present



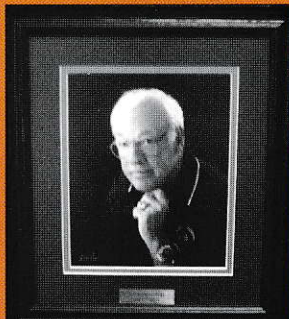
Eric A. Ludlow: 1992 - 2003



Paul F. Graf: 1979 - 1991



J. Ralph Atkin: 1971 - 1974



**Phillip Lang Foremaster:
1963 - 1970**

been involved in," Belnap adds.

Such notorious cases are thankfully rare in Southern Utah, however, and some cases can even turn downright comical. J. Ralph Atkin ('65), who served as county attorney from 1971 to 1974, enjoys telling of a marijuana bust he directed in the Virgin River Basin. A large area was being cultivated, and after he and the sheriff surveyed the fields from a helicopter, the police raided the growers in the middle of the night.

They expected to disrupt a multi-million dollar drug operation, but Atkin laughs at the growers' failure. Without enough water, the crop had withered in the desert. In the end, they arrested only two people.

FOUNDATION FOR LIFE

Dixie students today can enjoy four uninterrupted years of school. When each of these ten alumni sat for classes, though, Dixie offered only two years of higher education under the name of Dixie Junior College or simply Dixie College. In fact, when Leo A. Snow matriculated in the early 1900's it was still known as the St. George Stake Academy.

The one thing they all have in common, though, is the foundation that Dixie provided for their later achievements. "Going to Dixie College and participating in a variety of activities gave me the confidence to attempt and excel at any endeavor I tried," explains Pickett.

Pickett says Dixie's smaller size was key to his early college success. "Attending Dixie gave me the opportunity to participate in many activities one might not get at a larger school," he says. And he participated with gusto. Fond memories abound of playing on the football, basketball, track and field, and tennis teams; serving as class president and debate manager; performing the lead role in a school play; and being honored as Outstanding Debater and Outstanding Extemporaneous Speaker.

Paul Graf ('69), who was elected county attorney for three terms from 1979 to 1991, benefitted from Dixie's compactness, as well. He remembers having too many interests in his early college years to narrow them down to a single career choice. Getting involved in a wide variety of activities at Dixie allowed him to look at a lot of professions and choose the direction for his life.

Eric Ludlow ('82), county attorney from 1992 to 2003, calls his years at Dixie a "magical time," especially his stint with the basketball team. During Ludlow's sophomore year at Dixie, the basketball team qualified for the

national finals and traveled to Hutchinson, Kansas.

"Dixie was the only game in town then," he says, "and the whole community supported us."

Ludlow's professors also took a personal interest in their students and would "bend over backwards" to help them.

Ludlow enthusiastically remembers teachers such as Delora Hunt, who was concerned about the athletes missing classes for game travel. To help, she allowed him and his fellow basketball players to take makeup exams at her home—where she also cooked dinner for them. "Where else can you get something like that?" he asks.

Graf also speaks highly of his professors, ones like Roene DiFiore, the music teacher who welcomed everyone to her performance choirs and was known to call on students to sing solos without any prior notice. "She brought out the best in her students," he says, by expecting more of them and giving them the one-on-one training they needed to shine.

Most of Pickett's memories center completely on pure, college-age fun, such as traveling to Ogden in the back of a three-ton truck for football games and taking Dixie Junior College President Arthur Bruhn on a horseback trip over Pine Valley Mountain. Yet Pickett's favorite memories are the people. "The best part of Dixie College," he quickly points out, "was the scores of students and teachers who became life-long and loyal friends."

During his two years, Atkin enjoyed playing on the tennis team and performing the lead role in Dixie's theatrical production of "The Life of Father." His dramatic success led to him being honored as Outstanding Male Actor of the Year.

Most of all, though, Atkin expresses gratitude for his time at Dixie because it was central to his decision to enter the legal field. Pansy Hardy, who taught English and debate at both the college and high school, became his strongest influence and turned his interests to debate and logical thinking. When she introduced the class to a mock legislative forum, he was hooked, and he determined at a young age to study business and law.

CARRYING ON THE TRADITION

For most of these distinguished alumni, going to Dixie was as much about carrying on family tradition as about convenience. "Going to Dixie was not a choice, but an honor," declares Pickett. His own father, Ellis J. Pickett, graduated from Dixie College

Pickett's first experience in legal negotiation came during childhood. On hot summer days in St. George, he would run down the lane to meet the ice wagon, and driver, Grant Whitehead, would chip off a piece of ice for kids to suck on. "One day when I was about ten, Grant ran over my dog—a sad day," remembers Charlie. "We settled out of court for an extra piece of ice. Ten year old boys didn't have much legal clout in those days. Now'adays, I'd have owned his ice wagon!"