

Lakeway Area profiles

Local man starts from humble beginnings to eventually achieve his dreams

BY NICOLE SLIGER Tribune Staff Writer

Pulling up to Wind Drift, the 30-acre estate owned by Morristown Attorney Charles R. Terry and his wife Florence, one can't help but to feel the charm and charisma of all things Southern. Wind Drift is home to the Terry family—a cast of colorful characters who have forever changed life in the Lakeway Area.

When Charles and Florence Terry were married and soon started their family, little did they know that the beginnings of a unique dynasty would be born.

Charles Terry, a poor boy from Bulls Gap, made his dream of becoming a trial lawyer come true. Little did he know that he was paving the way for what would become a successful family of lawyers, athletic competitors and equestrian enthusiasts.

The couple were teen-age sweethearts and went on to East Tennessee State University where Charles held a basketball scholarship and would receive his B.S. degree and Florence would receive a degree in education. Charles earned his Juris Doctorate from the University of Tennessee in 1956 after being a student at Duke University. After graduating, Terry completed a tour of duty as an Army Judge Advocate General officer and then returned to his beloved Tennessee to open a practice.

From the beginning Charles knew he didn't want to be a prosecutor, but an advocate—a passion that proved to be a formula for success both professionally and at home. "I've always had sympathy for the man behind the plow, for the fellow that's been injured or needs someone to stand up for him," he says.

"I have always wanted to make a difference in the lives of people and that's something that we have installed in our children. Being an advocate for those behind the plow has been my life's passion, success and dedication."

Terry has developed a unique practice over the years—part criminal defense work and part product liability. The scope of the Terry law firm reaches far beyond East Tennessee and has indirectly affected the lives of many. He brought the first birth control product liability case to court in Tennessee; took on the charcoal industry after a family of four died from carbon monoxide poisoning and has collected some of the largest judgement against the railroads of this country for people injured or killed at improperly marked crossings. Over the years he has drastically changed the horse industry due to the Federal Horse Protection Act.

He did all of this while raising an active family of three. Three strong personalities and "live wires," as Charles calls them, who work together every day and still find time to play together. Family is the name of the game to the Terrys and has been since the beginning. "There's a certain adhesive between our family and the practice of law. We've always thrived on competition, whether it is in the courtroom or at home," he says.

Working as a team was the goal of Charles and Florence from the beginning. "When the children were growing up, they all participated in the Annual Terry Bowl each Thanksgiving Day. It was a football team between my brother Fred's family and ours. The children were inserted in the lineup and became a part of the playing team when they were 5 years old. The winning family got to take the trophy home until the next Terry Bowl. It was a valuable lesson about working together and the joys of winning as well as dealing with loss," he says.

From the Terry Bowl, the family has always been competitive in basketball, car racing, tennis and showing Tennessee Walking Horses. "We thrive on competition, but we don't lose sight of how we got where we are," he says.

"How they got there," is by sticking to the basics, says Charles. "What you need to be successful is dedication, a support system, and a passion for what you do."

"Florence and I have stuck to those principals in all we have done. I have loved every moment of my career as a lawyer, just as she loved every moment as an educator and with the horses, but nothing compares to the joys of being a parent. We've had a

passion for our children, have been dedicated to being a parent and will always be a support system for them," he says.

The Terry support system has proved vital to the Lakeway Area, creating a versatile and affective law firm and family which often asks the hard hitting questions and will face off even with the fiercest of opposition. Denise Southern Terry and her husband Mark Stapleton, F. Braxton Terry and his wife Jana Durham are all attorneys in the Terry firm with son, Chuck Terry, serving as an investigator for the group, as well his wife, Kathy Jones Terry.

With five Terry family attorneys and an investigator for every client, the firm has the ability to handle and litigate problems facing clients ranging from adoption to wrongful death, including criminal law and white collar crime, domestic relations, professional malpractice, Social Security disability, products liability and worker's compensation. Charles says that it's not skill or stamina that sets the dynamic five apart, but "heart."

"We believe in what we do. We believe in our clients and in the cause. You have to want to make a difference in the lives of people and choose to do that every day. That's what we tried to make our children realize growing up...to really change the world, the system, you have to choose to make a difference every day," he says.

The Terrys don't just work together. They are together for every holiday, birthday, special event, and family vacations, they entertain together and spend many evenings and Sundays together. "During the week you can usually find us having lunch or dinner together. That's just the way we are," he says.

"Florence is the heart of our team. She has always been there to make a difference in the life of this family and defines what a team player is. She's always ready to pitch in and help and never complains. She does it all with her quiet, understanding, sweet way. She's a chauffeur, chief social officer, emergency babysitter, chef and go getter," he says.

"You've got to be a mover and a shaker... Florence taught our children that just as much as I have. You've got to have the courage to put yourself out there and go for it. We believe in making your own destiny and that's a scary thing at times."

Terry has made much of his own "destiny," but it was a role as a father that has defined him more than anything.

"We've been blessed with children who knew what they wanted and had the courage to make that happen. Florence and I have been blessed just to be cheerleaders. There's something to be said for raising children who are living a life they choose and who are happy and fulfilled."

The proud father says he has had the privilege of being involved in some of the highest profile cases in the state, but one of the greatest privileges and thrills he has known has been to work side by side in the office and courtroom, and on and off the field, with his family.

Terry says his wife has taught the family diligence and patience and to give back...that the reward is often in the 'input and work' of something, not in the outcome," he says.

The Terrys are doing just that, now that they are "a tad older," he says, and life is settling in to a different pace. The couple does extensive volunteer work throughout the community and supports some of the Lakeway Area's most leading causes. "God has given so much to us and now it is our turn to give back," says Terry.

The Terry's adore spending time with her grandchildren, Cassidy and Jake Terry, Gabriel Charles Stapleton and John Robert Terry.

It was Florence who first introduced Charles to the world of walking horses and led the family into their love of the field.

Terry recalls the early days of the horse world with a gentle ease and a smile. "We would go and just have a good time. It was always a family thing. The kids would be in their playpens, we'd have a family picnic and just shoe one or two horses and enjoy it," he says.

Charles Terry is a dynamic man in the courtroom but says they are peaceful bunch and never argue or raise their voices at home. "We leave that to the courtroom, but can get good and rared up" at their next favorite past time: Walters State Community College Athletics, says Terry.

"We love WSCC athletics. It's the competitor in us and allows to show our support of the area. We're proud of our roots here and of all the people who make us a unique place to live. Welcoming athletes and their families into our 'home' is a way of saying that we're here for you and we're proud of you," he says.

One of Morristown's most colorful characters has much to be proud of. A long and loving marriage, happy children, a successful business and accomplished hobbies, but, nothing to be any prouder of than remembering where he came from and how he got here.



Terry