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HARRY C. SIGMAN RECEIVES BUSINESS LAW SECTION'S LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD

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The Business Law Section awarded its Lifetime Achievement Award for 2005 to Harry C. Sigman at the Annual Meeting of the State Bar of California in San Diego. The award is given each year to a member of the State Bar who over an extended period has made significant contributions to the Section or to business law generally in the State of California and who has achieved high status in the legal community.²

Harry Sigman is a sole practitioner. He is a law professor. He is a consultant to governments and to the private sector, he drafts laws, he lectures frequently, he writes prolifically, and his writings are published and read worldwide. Harry is on the road more than most bus drivers. He travels constantly — not in California alone nor just in the U.S., but throughout the world as a latter-day intellectual Johnny Appleseed planting seeds of U.S. principles and processes used in commercial financing transactions. He collects globally, like a jurisprudential Darwin, samples of commercial law principles and processes used in other countries; the better to compare and to understand our domestic species of financing transactions, always with the possibility of introducing new ideas into our domestic stock. A most unusual career!

Harry was born in Strasbourg, France in 1939, spent 15 months as a small child in Havana, and was then raised in New York City. He moved to Los Angeles in his teens. His father was an entrepreneur who engaged in various businesses, including commercial finance. Harry graduated in 1960 from UCLA, Phi Beta Kappa, with a double major in Political Science and Accounting, and from Harvard Law School in 1963. He clerked for Justice Raymond E. Peters, of the Supreme Court of California, and then worked for the law firm of Mitchell, Silberberg & Knupp in Los Angeles through 1969. During that period he began instructing at USC Law School and lecturing for the Continuing Education of the Bar. At the end of 1969 he joined the full-time faculty at USC Law School as an Associate Professor.

Harry Sigman then embarked on a path rarely traveled by an attorney with a similar background and interests. He wished the time flexibility to raise his children, since he was faced with the reality of being a single parent to a young son and daughter, to participate in bar and other institutions where he could contribute without fee and professionally enrich others and be enriched himself, and he desired

to practice law at the highest possible level. To achieve these goals, he became a solo practitioner in a “consulting practice, specializing in commercial law, on a worldwide consultative basis . . .” Harry since has written the book on how to lead such an atypical professional life, as he became in the intervening 35 years one of this country’s most



HARRY C. SIGMAN

respected and significant contributors to the field of commercial law.

He has consulted with, and held in-house seminars for, scores of private businesses and law firms, including such sophisticated organizations as Weil, Gotshal; O’Melveny & Myers; Gibson, Dunn; General Motors; G.E. Capital; and Comerica. He has also consulted with numerous governmental agencies and non-governmental organizations. They include the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office, UNCITRAL, the Law Commission of England, the Australia-New Zealand Bankers Association, the World Bank, Banco Central de la Republica Argentina, and the governments of New Zealand and Mexico, as well as law reform projects in Ukraine, Albania, and Macedonia.

He has written more than 20 articles on commercial law and secured transaction issues, which have been published not only in the U.S., but also in England, France, Belgium and Italy.

He has lectured or taught seminars at universities in Japan, Switzerland, Belgium, Israel, Uruguay, Spain, and the Netherlands. Outside the U.S., he has spoken before audiences in Hungary, Japan, Germany, England, Spain, the Netherlands, France, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Poland, and Switzerland.

Harry regularly lectures nationwide for such organizations as the California Continuing Education of the Bar, ALI-ABA, PLI, the Uniform Commercial Code Institute, and the American Bar Association.

Lifetime Achievement Award

In a tour de force, he was the sole lecturer for an ALI-ABA 12-hour course on the Fundamentals of Secured Transactions. For more specialized audiences, he has conducted 12 to 18-hour in-house seminars on the Uniform Commercial Code for some of the biggest and most prestigious law firms and businesses in the country.

Harry has also been a leader of organizations that are critical to the development and legislative adoption of commercial law reforms and to educational efforts surrounding those reforms. One of his most important leadership roles has been with the State Bar of California's Business Law Section, where he chaired, and has served for over 30 years as a member of, its Uniform Commercial Code Committee. He also has served as a Governor and Past President of the Financial Lawyers Conference, and as a Regent of the American College of Commercial Finance Lawyers. He has held leadership positions in the UCC Committee of the ABA's Section of Business Law and the Los Angeles County Bar Association's Commercial Law and Bankruptcy Section.

Could there possibly be more? Emphatically, yes!

He has served as a member of the U.S. Secretary of State's Advisory Committee on Private International Law, and as a U.S. Delegate to UNCITRAL, UNIDROIT, and the Hague Conference on Private International Law. These efforts have resulted in completed Conventions now open for adoption by the nations of the world.

Harry has been heavily involved with UCC law reform. He was an ABA Advisor to the Drafting Committee for UCC Article 1. Of special importance were the roles Harry played in the enormously successful major rewrite of UCC Article 9, dealing with financing transactions secured by personal property. During this multi-year project, Harry was a member of the formal Drafting Committee to Revise UCC Article 9 of NCCUSL, following an earlier stint as a member of the Article 9 Study Committee of the UCC Permanent Editorial Board. That decade-long effort was followed by educational/political work to promote enactment throughout the U.S. This effort culminated in 2001 with passage in all states of the new Article 9.

Harry was highly influential in devising the Article 9 theories and practical systems for applying those theories associated with the all-important filing of financing statements relating to security interests in collateral that make effective the U.S. commercial financing structure. His work in part involved serving as a critical bridge between the UCC drafters of Article 9 and the administrators of government filing offices throughout the U.S. The latter had to confront the practical issues associated with operating these state-specific, complex systems. He assumed an important role as a member of the UCC Article 9 Filing Project of the University of Minnesota and in working with the International Association of Commercial Administrators to create standard form financing statements. That work made

the filing systems more efficient in practice for attorneys and parties with a stake in commercial financings.

Finally, he has served as a mentor and a nudge. Although no title accompanies these functions, it may be one of his most important. Much like the very best of sports team coaches, Harry is well known for demanding excellence and a high level of contribution from all of the "volunteers" with whom he has worked over the decades. The written works delivered are one testimony to his insistence on quality and productivity. Another result is the scores of lawyers and academics who have learned from Harry, who have worked at a high level on mutual projects because of Harry, and who have followed his example and have gone on in admirable careers of their own to also make major contributions to the field. Yet a third result is institutional. He has infused the State Bar Business Law Section's UCC Committee with a standard of excellence that has elevated that Committee's stature within the Bar and before the California legislature; all prerequisites to the substantial influence that Committee now possesses.

Harry is now in his mid-60s. He should be taking time to enjoy his children and grandchildren. He does. He should be devoting more time to his lifelong interest in art and design and his collection of art nouveau/Jugendstil/Sezession objects. (Pieces in his collection date primarily from the period 1890-1905 and can be viewed by some museum-goers.) He does that too. Has he slowed down in his dedication to the law of commercial finance? You would have to ask him yourself — if you can catch up with him at some distant global conference, lecturing assignment, or legislative drafting session — but all the evidence is to the contrary.

The American College of Commercial Financial Services Lawyers formally recognized Harry earlier in 2005 by presenting to him the 2005 Homer Kripke Award for lifetime achievement and contribution to the field of commercial finance law. The Business Law Section is pleased to join in the acclaim by honoring Harry C. Sigman as the recipient of its Lifetime Achievement Award for 2005. ■

Endnotes

¹ Mr. Brandel is Chair of the Business Law Section's Lifetime Achievement Award Committee, is a former Chair of the Business Law Section's Executive Committee, currently serves as a Special Advisor to the Executive Committee, and is a Senior Counsel at the firm of Morrison & Foerster LLP. Susan Orloff, John Power and Steven Weise each contributed to this article.

² Past recipients have been: John B. Power (2004); William B. Burke (2003); Marshall L. Small (2002); George R. Richter (2001); William D. Warren (2000); R. Bradbury Clark (1998); Richard Jennings (1998); and Harold Marsh, Jr. (1997).