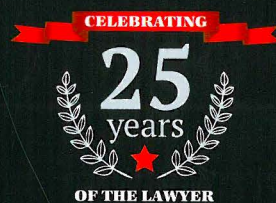
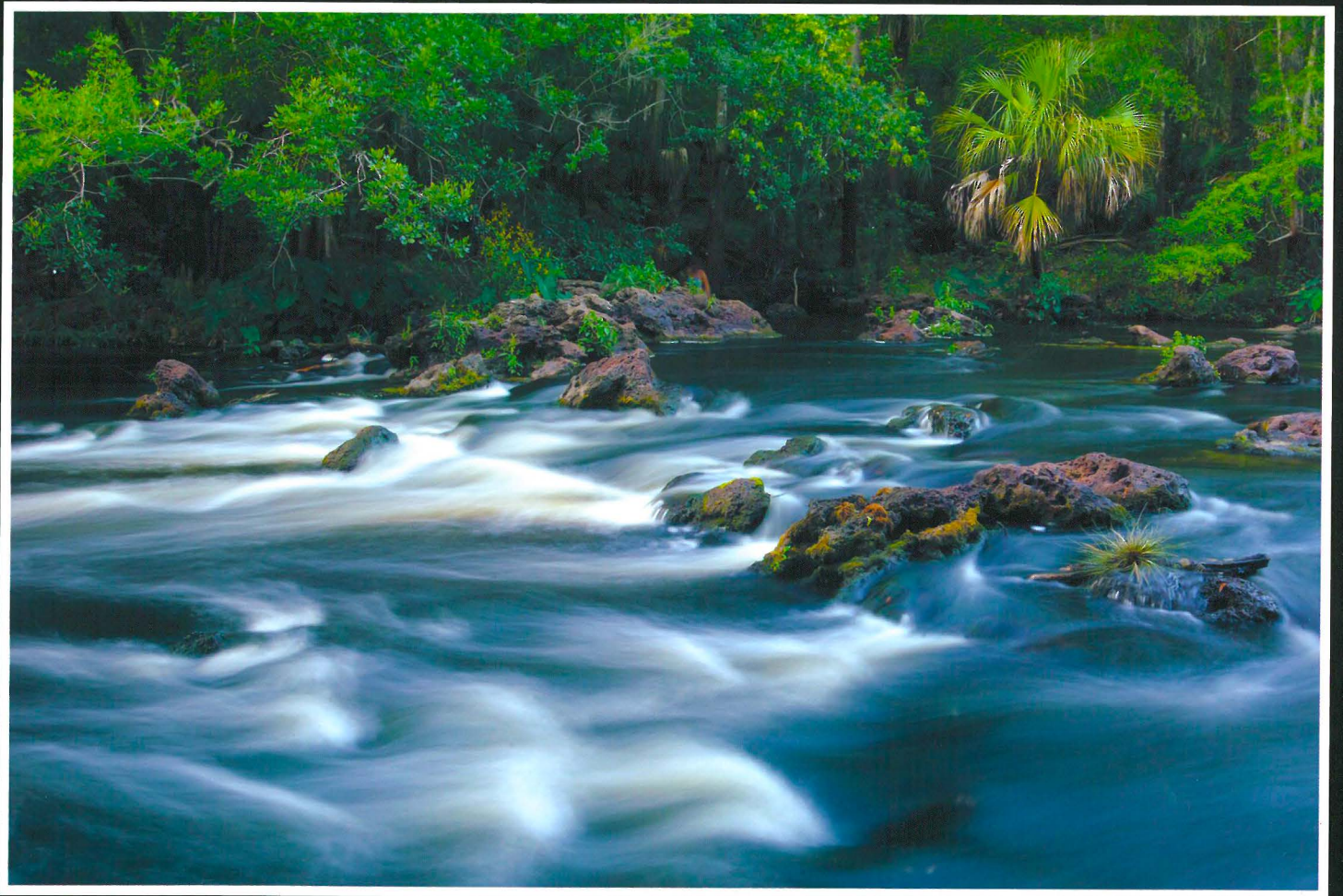


LAWYER

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A Legacy That Lasts: George E. Edgecomb

*“Good friend, in the path I have come,” he said,
“There followed after me today
A youth whose feet must pass this way.
This chasm that has been as naught to me
To that fair-haired youth may a pitfall be;
He, too, must cross in the twilight dim;
Good friend, I am building this bridge for him!”*

— from “The Bridge Builder” by Will Allen Dromgoole

In Florida, one becomes accustomed to the sight of bridges. Indeed, bridges are everywhere across our fair state, allowing travelers to cross expanses of water, vast or small, to arrive at our intended destination. Rarely noticed or noted are those who came before to build the bridge, across which so many have traveled. Every so often, however, a bridge is built so exceedingly well that its builder must be etched in history. Such is the case of the late Honorable George E. Edgecomb.

A native of West Tampa, Edgecomb graduated from George S. Middleton High School with honors in 1960, where he served as president of the student body. Leadership would be a theme of Edgecomb’s life, both as a student and law professional.

After high school, Edgecomb attended Clark College in Atlanta, where he served as president of the freshman class, sophomore class, and ultimately president of the student

body. It was during this time that he met Tampa attorney Delano S. Stewart.

“I did not know George at the time, but my parents knew of him and asked that I find George when I started classes at Morehouse,” Stewart says. Taking his parents’ advice, Stewart sought out Edgecomb, and the two established an enduring friendship.

“God creates people for a purpose. He [Edgecomb] was president of the freshman class, sophomore class, and the student body president for two years. He was respected and admired by his peers. He was destined to do what he did swiftly — that was his destiny,” Stewart says.

The destiny Stewart refers to began in 1968, when Edgecomb received his Juris Doctorate degree from Howard University School of Law. After graduation, Edgecomb returned to Tampa and began his legal career as an attorney working with Stewart.

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CELEBRATING

25
years

OF THE LAWYER

On January 29, 2004, the Thirteenth Judicial Circuit Court dedicated the George E. Edgecomb Courthouse in honor of Hillsborough County's first African-American judge. Inside the courthouse, this sculpture depicts Judge Edgecomb "rising out of rock to symbolize his reputation as a man of deep integrity based upon the fundamental and timeless principles of freedom and equality for all. He is holding a book of Law, the foundation upon which these ideals rest," according to the county's website. This photograph of the sculpture was featured on the cover of the *Lawyer* magazine in 2011.



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Edgecomb did not consider his only obligation as that owed to his clients; he felt a great obligation to serve his community. Accordingly, he served on the Greater Tampa Urban League Board of Directors and received multiple awards for his service to Tampa's underserved communities.

On August 13, 1973, George Edgecomb was invested as a county judge, becoming the first African-American judge in Hillsborough County. He was also the first African-American chief assistant county solicitor and Hillsborough County's first African-American assistant state attorney.

Judge Edgecomb passed away on January 22, 1976. In 1982, Judge Edgecomb's friends and colleagues created the George Edgecomb Bar Association (GEBA) to preserve his legacy. Today, GEBA boasts a membership of more than 100 lawyers, judges, and law students.

Though I began practicing law 30 years after Judge Edgecomb's passing, I have walked across the bridge that he and other trailblazers have built. I have been a member of GEBA since I arrived in Tampa in 2006; I was sworn in as a lawyer at the George E. Edgecomb Courthouse. It is likely that the view and capacity of African-American lawyers in our community have been shaped, in part, by Judge Edgecomb's varied accomplishments in the legal profession.

There is no doubt that any success I and other African-American lawyers may claim would not be possible without the planks that were laid down, the towers that were erected, and the cables that were suspended by the late Honorable George E. Edgecomb.



*Author: Cory J. Person -
Butler Pappas Weihmuller
Katz Craig LLP*