

South Carolina lawyers lead through public service

The S.C. Bar Foundation Board of Directors has named the Honorable Ernest A. Finney Jr. and Mr. Leo H. Hill as the 2005 DuRant Distinguished Public Service Award recipients. The honors will be conferred on Finney and Hill at the S.C. Bar's annual convention on Friday, January 27, in Charleston.

Born in Smithfield, Virginia, Finney received his undergraduate degree from Claflin College and his law degree from S.C. State University. Admitted to the Bar in 1954, Finney practiced law in Conway and Sumter for 22 years. He carried the banner of justice in many landmark civil rights cases which shaped state law. He represented Sumter County from 1972 to 1976 in the S.C. House of Representatives and chaired the Legislative Black Caucus for two years. Noted as an effective legislator of outstanding abilities, Finney was elected to the S.C. Circuit Court and served on the Third Circuit Bench for nine years.

Finney was the first African American in the state's history to sit on the Circuit Court bench. His 1985 election as associate justice of the S.C. Supreme Court marked the return of an African American to the high court for the first time since Reconstruction. In 1994, Finney was elected chief justice of the Supreme Court. He currently practices law in Sumter.

Hill earned a Bachelor of Arts from Erskine College and his Juris Doctor from USC School of Law. He practices with Nelson Mullins in Greenville in the areas of government relations, utility regulation, construction and environmental law, litigation, administrative law and alternative dispute resolution. Hill is admitted to practice before the Fourth U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals, the U.S. District Court for the District of South Carolina and the U.S. Court of International Trade.

Hill served as Bar president (1968–1969) and has received many commendations including the Distinguished Service Award from the American Arbitration Association (1991), the Compleat Lawyer Award from USC School of Law (1993), the Tommy Thomason Award from the Greenville County Bar Association and a listing in *The Best Lawyers of America* since 1992. Hill was instrumental in the formation of the legal services agencies (now known as the S.C. Centers for Equal Justice), the Bail Bond Reform Act, the S.C. Public Defender System, the Lawyer Referral Service, the Bar Foundation and the Government Law Section. He co-authored with Gary Hill *Doing the Public's Business* and has authored other publications including a book of poetry, *A Few Lines*.

Considered the most prestigious statewide recognition that is bestowed upon an attorney, the DuRant Award recipient is nominated and selected by his or her professional peers. The Foundation established the award in memory of Charlton DuRant, a well-known Manning attorney who served as state senator and special associate justice of the S.C. Supreme Court.