Bradley Jones helped found major law firm

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By Susan Gilmore

When Tyler Jones was visiting Seattle once on business, his father gave him a ride to the airport and Jones hoped to engage his father in a deep conversation about law and the world.

Jones asked his father, prominent attorney Bradley Jones, what had been the most important part of his life.

“There’s never been any doubt,” Mr. Jones told his son. “It’s the happiness of my children. Everything else pales in comparison.”

Mr. Jones, 87, a founding partner of what is now the Davis Wright Tremaine law firm, died Friday of congestive heart failure at his Bainbridge Island home.

Known for his quick mind and sense of humor, Mr. Jones practiced 38 years for the law firm that once bore his name. He served as president of the Seattle-King County Bar Association and the State Bar Association and still found time to teach Sunday school at his Episcopal church.

“He had a significant impact on the way the firm operated,” said Brad Diggs, a former managing partner of the firm. “What he was known most of all for was being a very intelligent man with an elegant and quiet mind who spoke and wrote clearly and simply.”

Mr. Jones was a mentor for many of the younger attorneys, such as Diggs, who passed through the office.

For many years before he retired in 1990, Mr. Jones was the managing partner responsible for the business and economics of the law firm.

He was the inspiration behind the merger of two small firms in 1969 to form the present firm, according to his former law partner, Jim Judson. The two groups were approaching the merger as an economic issue. It was Mr. Jones who recognized how much business the merged firms would attract, Judson said.

“Everybody agreed, but he was the person who drove the idea,” Judson said. “He was a professional’s professional. He was recognized by his peers as a quality lawyer and a quality person.”
Brad Jones’ specialty was business law, and many of his clients were in the food-processing and building-materials industries. “He was good at bringing in clients, bringing in money and exercising good judgment,” Judson said.

Diggs remembers Mr. Jones’ retirement dinner. Mr. Jones said that as he looked back at his practice, what he remembered most clearly and fondly were not the intricacies of the deals he had made or the victories he had won, but the lasting relationships he had built over the years with his partners, other attorneys, his office staff and his clients.

Mr. Jones was born in 1917 in South Dakota. His father was a law and journalism professor, and in 1920 the family moved to Seattle, where Mr. Jones’ father taught at the University of Washington.

Mr. Jones graduated from the UW law school in 1941 and joined the law firm where he would practice throughout his legal career. He married (turning down a Rhodes Scholarship), and served with the U.S. Army in the Pacific during World War II.

When he returned from the war in 1945, after recovering from malaria, he returned to work with the law firm, which was called Howe, Davis, Reese and Jones.

In 1948 he moved with his family to Mount Vernon, where he became vice president of Pictsweet Foods. He stayed there until 1956, when he returned to his law firm.

Mr. Jones retired in 1990 and spent his time golfing, reading and tending his prized rhododendrons.

The family had a cabin near Poulsbo, said Tyler Jones, and would spend many summer days there digging clams, rowing, sailing and fishing.

Mr. Jones was also a big UW Huskies fan and always had season tickets, his son said.

John Davis, another founding member of the law firm who, at 91, still goes to the office three days a week, said Mr. Jones was a close friend with great integrity. “He had a keen desire to be of fellow service to his fellow man,” he said.

Mr. Jones was a senior partner when Parry Grover joined the law firm, and he became both a friend and a mentor, Grover said.

“He instilled in me the understanding that the client comes first,” Grover said. “As long as you’re behaving ethically you can’t go wrong. That’s what he instilled in the young lawyers around him. He was a teacher who really shaped your life and certainly shaped my professional life.”
Services will be held at 6 p.m. Wednesday at St. Barnabas Episcopal Church, 1187 Wyatt Way, Bainbridge Island. Tyler Jones, an ordained Episcopal priest who now lives in Germany, will officiate.

In addition to his son Tyler, Mr. Jones is survived by another son, Robert, of Corvallis, Ore.; a daughter, Carolyn Dewald of New York state, and five grandchildren. Mr. Jones’ wife, Phyllis, preceded him in death.

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