

FOUNDATION

EVENING ON THE PLAZA

John Arthur Hammerschmidt to Receive 2006 Ozarks Ambassador Award

Looking back on a two-decade career in government service that has taken him places and offered him experiences and memories far different from those most others have known, John Arthur Hammerschmidt sums up his life so far in a simple way. "It has been quite a ride," he says, "for someone who grew up running around the Harrison square. I hope I have represented my hometown well."

In fact, Hammerschmidt has represented his hometown so ably that he will receive the 2006 Ozarks Ambassador Award presented by the North Arkansas College Foundation. The award will be given by his longtime friend Larry Brandt on May 12 during the 2006 Evening on the Plaza Dinner at North Arkansas College.

The son of a famous man, former U.S. Rep. John Paul Hammerschmidt, John Arthur—John, as he is known to his friends—got an early taste of independence. After attending the Harrison Public Schools for the first nine grades, his parents, John Paul and Virginia, sent John to Woodberry Forest School in Virginia for high school.

"They drove me to Memphis, where we spent the night, and the next day they put me on the train



John Arthur Hammerschmidt

Courtesy of the Arkansas Democrat-Gazette, copyright 2006.

to Orange, Virginia, with my two suitcases," John recalls. "That is still a vivid memory."

Dartmouth College was next. John was a member of the football and wrestling teams, earned a degree in history with highest distinction, and was named a Rufus Choate Scholar. One course he struggled with, however, was Calculus.

"My professor was a man named John Kemeny," John remembers. "He had been Albert Einstein's mathematician at Princeton and

co-authored BASIC, one of the first computer programming languages. That's the kind of place Dartmouth was—John Kemeny taught Introductory Calculus."

For nine years after finishing college, John worked in the family business, Hammerschmidt Lumber Company, in Harrison. He was active in the local community, serving as president of the Boone County Industrial Development Corporation, a member of the Rotary Club board,

(continued on page 2)

and as a United Way board director. As chief executive officer of the business in its final years, he negotiated the sale of the assets of Hammerschmidt Lumber to the Meek's of Springfield, Mo., business acquaintances of the Hammerschmidt's for three generations.

By 1984, the lure of federal government service called John to Washington, D.C., where he worked as a staff assistant in the Office of Vice President George H.W. Bush. Later, he was a field coordinator for the Reagan-Bush Re-Election Campaign in Louisiana.

After the successful campaign, Hammerschmidt returned to Washington. A chance encounter with an old family friend, National Transportation Safety Board Chairman Jim Burnett of Clinton, changed his life.

"I saw Jim Burnett walking down a hallway in the Rayburn House Office Building one day. My 1978 Honda hatchback was parked in the building garage and I asked him if I could give him a ride anywhere," John says. "He said he wouldn't mind a ride back to his office, which was seven or eight blocks away. During that drive, he offered me a job."

Burnett explained that his special assistant of several years had just been diagnosed with a terminal illness and would not be returning to work; therefore, he needed someone he could trust to immediately fill the open position. "I didn't think he was serious—I thought he was just being polite—so I didn't follow up on it," Hammerschmidt reports. "About a week later, he called me and asked again whether or not I was interested."

John went to the NTSB offices the next morning for a briefing about the job, was offered the position of Special Assistant to the Chairman (on an emergency basis), accepted, and was sworn in all on the same day. He recalls Burnett showing him his new office and saying, "You already have some work in your in-box."

Hammerschmidt points to Burnett's service and dedication as a model he attempted to follow. "Jim was extremely dedicated," John says. "He thought nothing of working until midnight, or later, and of course we worked weekends and holidays when we were at an accident scene."

After six years as a special assistant, John was nominated by President George H.W. Bush to the NTSB five-member Board and was confirmed by the U.S. Senate on June 26, 1991. He was re-appointed by President Bill Clinton and President George W. Bush, and served 12 years as an NTSB Board Member, the second longest tenure in the history of the NTSB. With his six years as a special assistant, Hammerschmidt's time with the NTSB ranks first among all political appointees in its history.

Near the end of his service on the Board, John was appointed by President George W. Bush as Vice

OZARKS AMBASSADOR AWARD

The Ozarks Ambassador Award will be presented to John Arthur Hammerschmidt during the Foundation's annual Evening on the Plaza Dinner Friday, May 12. North Arkansas College President Dr. Jeff Olson, who will host the dinner, and First Federal Bank Chairman and Chief Executive Officer Larry Brandt, Hammerschmidt's longtime friend, will make the presentation.

The Evening on the Plaza Dinner will be held in the Conference Center of the John Paul Hammerschmidt Business and Conference Center on Northark's South Campus at 6:30 p.m. It will be preceded by a reception on the JPH Plaza at the college from 6 to 6:30 p.m. Tickets for the event are \$25 each. For more information, contact Brittany Bruton (391-3159) or Micki Somers (391-3242).

Established in 1990, the Ozarks Ambassador Award is presented to someone from northern Arkansas who has represented the area with distinction nationwide in one or more of the following fields: agriculture, finance, medicine, education, politics, law, business, social services, the ministry, or industry.

Robert M. Eagle of Dallas, TX, was the 1990 recipient; James H. Jones of San Francisco, CA, was honored in 1991; David R. Banks, now of Fort Smith, received the award in 1992; William P. Stiritz of St. Louis, MO, was the 1993 honoree; James F. Keenan of Palm Beach, FL, received the honor in 1994; Dr. Ronald C. Jones of Dallas, TX, was the 1995 recipient; Tom and Don Salmon of Little Rock were honored in 1996; John Paul Hammerschmidt of Harrison was recognized in 1997; C.D. Wright of Barrington, RI, was the 1998 honoree; Sheridan Garrison of Harrison was presented with the award in 1999; David Perry of Mountain View, Calif., was the 2000 recipient; University of Arkansas Chancellor Dr. John A. White was honored in 2002; former Arkansas Supreme Court Chief Justice Jack Holt, Jr. received the 2003 honor; and Northark graduate and former Tyson Foods General Counsel Les Baledge was recognized in 2004.

The award was not presented in 2001 or 2005. Instead, the Foundation recognized retiring North Arkansas College President Dr. Bill Baker at the BBB Bar-B-Que and Blow-Out in 2001 and honored former Twin Lakes Vocational Technical School Director Weldon Stevenson in 2005.

Chairman, and therefore Acting Chairman, marking the first time anyone had ever advanced from a staff-level position to Chairman of the NTSB. During his final Senate confirmation hearing, not one Senator asked a question of the Harrison native, an unprecedented occurrence in NTSB hearings.

As Bret Schulte wrote in a 2001 high profile feature about John in the *Arkansas Democrat Gazette*, his work was “performed against a backdrop of immeasurable suffering, unanswered questions and glaring media exposure.” Members of the NTSB “go-team” had to be ready to travel in their government Gulfstream IV jet to investigate accident scenes on a moment’s notice.

Sometimes, however, getting to the scene of an accident was much more difficult. One example for Hammerschmidt was Comair Flight 3272, which crashed on approach to Detroit Metropolitan/Wayne County Airport, killing all 29 on board, Jan. 9, 1997. John was with his father and mother at a hospital in Springfield, Mo., where his mother had just been diagnosed with cancer, when he got the call.

One of only three passengers on a TWA Express ATR-72, an airplane he had investigated two years earlier for its “susceptibility to go into a snap roll” in icy conditions, Hammerschmidt flew through winter weather in Springfield to Detroit via St. Louis. Renting a car in blizzard-like Detroit with wind chills of 40-below, he arrived at his motel at 5 a.m., left a wakeup call for 6:15, met with NTSB investigators at 7, viewed the accident scene, then conducted a 30-minute press conference that was broadcast live on CNN shortly before noon.

Hammerschmidt participated on-scene in more than five dozen



Courtesy of The Cincinnati Enquirer, copyright 1997.

John Arthur Hammerschmidt makes a point during a press briefing following the Comair Flight 3272 accident near Detroit in January of 1997.

major accident investigations and public hearings while at NTSB, involving all transportation modes: highway, aviation, rail, marine, pipeline, and space launch. In fact, a colleague of John’s pointed out to him recently that the Challenger and Columbia space shuttle tragedies were like bookends for his NTSB career. In both cases, NTSB’s services were requested by NASA and Hammerschmidt was involved.

John’s on-scene investigations included the 2001 collision between the U.S. nuclear attack submarine *USS Greeneville* and the Japanese fisheries training vessel *Ehime Maru* near Honolulu, Hawaii; the 2001 CSX freight train derailment, fire and hazardous materials release within a tunnel beneath the city of Baltimore, Maryland; the 2000 Alaska Airlines flight 261 accident near Point Mugu, California; the 1999 gasoline pipeline accident in Bellingham, Washington; the 1996 collision of the bulk carrier *Bright Field* with the Port of New Orleans

River Walk Shopping Mall; the 1995 Atlantic Southeast Airlines EMB-120 commuter accident at Carrollton, Georgia; the 1994 USAir DC-9 accident at Charlotte, North Carolina; and the 1993 Amtrak accident near Mobile, Alabama, the worst in Amtrak history. As a footnote, Hammerschmidt later attended the lecture by retired Commander Scott Waddle, the captain of the *USS Greeneville*, who spoke in April of 2005 at North Arkansas College in the John Paul Hammerschmidt Lecture Series.

Among the public hearings that John chaired for the Board were: in 2000, the four-day hearing on the Alaska Airlines Flight 261 accident; in 1999, the hearing in Miami, Florida, on the 1998 fire aboard the cruise ship *MS Ecstasy* as the vessel was leaving the port of Miami; in 1997, the four-day hearing in San Juan, Puerto Rico, on the worst pipeline accident ever investigated by the Board, an explosion that killed 33 people there; in 1995, the five-day hearing in Indianapolis, Indiana,

John Arthur Hammerschmidt to be Honored

on the American Eagle ATR-72 accident near Roselawn, Indiana; and in 1994, the four-day hearing in Charlotte, North Carolina, on the USAir DC-9 accident there.

Representing NTSB, John has been the featured or keynote speaker at nearly 30 conferences in six different countries during his career. One memorable example came in 2002, when he was the keynote speaker at the 33rd Annual Conference of the International Society of Air Safety Investigators in Taipei, Taiwan, and was welcomed by the President of the Republic of China, Chen Shui-bian.

Along with the widely publicized duties of his job, John took pride in his role reviewing appeals of suspensions and other actions taken by the Federal Aviation Administration. On more than one occasion, he

voted against the majority decision of the Board on such matters. In fact, Hammerschmidt's dissenting vote was a factor in a 2003 opinion written by now-U.S. Supreme Court Chief Justice John Roberts overturning a 3-to-2 NTSB ruling. It was Roberts' second opinion as a U.S. Court of Appeals Judge.

Following his retirement as chair of the NTSB, where he administered a \$72 million budget and supervised a staff of 430 investigators, scientists and administrative personnel, John now works for the Department of Homeland Security's Office of Legislative Affairs. Assigned to the Transportation Security Administration, his duties have focused on working with Members of Congress and congressional staff to determine the best ways to improve the security of the nation's many transportation systems,

aviation in particular. He is currently serving "on a detail" at Washington Dulles International Airport.

With 20 years of federal service officially completed this past March 1, Hammerschmidt has been spending more time of late in Harrison with his father, following the January death of his beloved mother, Virginia. "My mother's leaving us is causing me to re-think quite a few things," John says.

John Arthur Hammerschmidt may not know yet what his future holds, but his legacy at the National Transportation Safety Board is secure. On Friday, May 12, he will be honored by his friends and neighbors in Harrison and the North Arkansas College Foundation for his dedicated and outstanding service to our country.

It has indeed been quite a ride!

PLEASE REMEMBER THE NORTH ARKANSAS COLLEGE FOUNDATION IN YOUR WILL. YOUR GIFTS AFFECT THE LIVES OF OUR STUDENTS.
The Internal Revenue Service has classified the North Arkansas College Foundation, Inc., as tax exempt under Section 501 (c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Service Code.

FOUNDATION
North Arkansas College Foundation, Inc.

1515 Pioneer Drive • Harrison, Arkansas 72601
Phone: (870) 391-3159 • Fax: (870) 391-391-3329

Non-Profit Org.
U.S. Postage
PAID
Harrison, AR
Permit No. 99

NORTHARK
Board of Trustees

NORTHARK FOUNDATION
Board of Directors

Norma Ellis Melanie Savells	James Troy Massey Jim Sprott	Louis Melton Scott Tennyson	Jim Milum Wayne Thompson	Laretta Moore
Dan Bowers Marcelle Lawrence	Cathy Brandt Judy Loving	Helen Clavey Kay Maris	J. D. Erwin Dave Morton	Jim Gresham Pat Reed
			Jerry Jackson Steve Stafford	Clyde Johnson Wayne Thompson