

Joe Owen named as Distinguished alum

Special to the Ledger



Photo provided

Joe Owen

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MURRAY - Murray State University recently named Joe Owen, a respected lawyer, business owner and property developer, as one of the 2018 recipients of the Distinguished Alumni Award.

Owen is a native of Kuttawa and a graduate of Lyon County High School, who found his way to Murray State following in the footsteps of his mother and sister. He received a bachelor's degree in business administration after being inspired by his brother-in-law, Tom Hutchens. He had always planned on pursuing a career in business but had no idea where that would take him.

Looking back on his time at Murray State, he recalls being involved in a number of extracurricular activities, which allowed him to take advantage of various opportunities during his undergraduate career.

"I thoroughly enjoyed my total college experience," Owen said. "I was involved in many social activities in college, but I sincerely appreciated my classroom experiences as well as my academic endeavors." In addition, Owen noted, "My classes were engaging and generally small; you could actually have open communication with your professors. I always felt every effort was made to assist students and make us feel like a valued member of the Murray State campus."

While at Murray State, Owen was an active member of the Sigma Chi fraternity and served on the Student Government Association as treasurer. His sophomore year, he was elected as class vice president. One of Owen's favorite memories during his time at Murray State was serving as concert committee chairman on the Student Government Association Board. He and his team worked diligently to book Dick Clark and the Caravan of Stars for a concert in Murray State's gymnasium. Another fond memory included his reign as social chairman for Sigma Chi where he secured the popular Bo Diddley for a Sigma Chi Sweetheart Dance in the old Student Union ballroom. In addition to the meaningful educational experiences, these events added to his unforgettable years at Murray State.

Upon graduating from Murray State in 1965, Owen enrolled in law school at the University of Louisville and experienced a new world of academia.

"When you attend law school or grad school, you quickly learn the majority of the social activities are a thing of the past," Owen said. "Everyone is totally focused on academics — staying in school and graduating. It was a much different educational experience but certainly a rewarding journey."

After graduating from law school, Owen returned to Benton to practice law as a member of the law firm Prince and Owen, which later became Owen, Harvey & Carter, from 1971 to 1991. His business degree allowed him to pursue professional

development opportunities in many diverse areas during his career. In 1979, Owen founded and was named president and CEO of J. Jerod & Associates, Inc., also in Benton, which is a multi-family real estate development and property management company. J. Jerod & Associates continues to operate and has developed, owned or managed more than 3,600 apartment units in six southeastern states.

From there, Owen's professional career developed rapidly, leading him to opportunities to continue to manage and develop real estate. Home Care Management, Inc., was founded with Owen serving as CEO and president from 1990 to 1996. The company owned and operated group homes to fulfill the needs of intellectually disabled individuals across Kentucky. At the same time, Owen became co-owner and member of the Board of Directors for American Mortgage Source, Inc., (AMS) in Nashville, Tennessee, from 1991 to 1996. AMS provided full mortgage services from multiple offices in the southeast region. Both companies were sold in 1996 to publicly traded national companies.

In 2001, Owen acquired The Guardian Group located in Brentwood, Tennessee, and became CEO and president of the firm. The Guardian Group operated two separate companies: Guardian Healthcare Providers, Inc., a national professional health care staffing company, and Guardian Community Living, LLC, which operated group homes to fulfill the needs of intellectually disabled individuals across Tennessee. Under Owen's management team, employment increased from 160 to 1,500 employees and revenues increased from \$10 million to approximately \$50 million before Guardian Community Living was sold in 2013. Guardian Healthcare Providers continues to grow and presently employs more than 500 professional health care staff in 16 states across the nation. From a revenue standpoint, the company ranks in the top 12 percent of health care staffing companies in the U.S.

Guardian Healthcare Providers was recognized by the Middle Tennessee Chamber of Commerce as a top 10 finalist for the Fastest Growing Private Companies for four consecutive years. The company was also named a top five finalist for four consecutive years in Nashville Business Journal's competition for the "Healthiest Companies to Work for in Middle Tennessee."

From 2006 to 2016, Owen served on the Board of Directors for the American Association of International Healthcare Recruiters (AAIHR), serving as vice president from 2006 to 2013. Presently, he serves as a member of the Kentucky Board of Directors for Sunrise Children's Services (formerly Kentucky Baptist Home for Children).

One of his greatest business achievements is being a managing member of a small real estate group that has condominium and hotel projects completed, under construction or in development. These developments include Rutledge Hill Development, LLC. (City Lights Condominiums), Poston at the Park, LLC (condominiums) and Skyline Hospitality, LLP (Skyline Hampton Inn).

The Poston at the Park is a 27-unit luxury condominium building located in the West End area of Nashville near Vanderbilt University. The City Lights development is an 11-story building containing 71 luxury condominiums under construction overlooking downtown Nashville, the Cumberland River and Nissan Stadium. The Skyline Hampton Inn project is a 126-unit hotel under construction located north of Nashville on Interstate 65 at Skyline Hospital.

"It's very exciting to be actively involved in the Nashville real estate market and playing a minor role in changing the skyline of the city," Owen said.

Owen credits the education and guiding principles he received during his undergraduate career at Murray State with preparing him for leadership responsibilities and the ability to develop management teams dedicated to the success of the project or company. Owen summed up his life and business philosophy by stating, "Regardless of the successes or failures you have in business, it is imperative that you manage your priorities of faith, family and then business for a happy and successful life."

Since leaving Murray State, Owen has remained a loyal Racer fan, supporting the university's many athletic teams. He is on the Murray State University Foundation Board of Trustees and continues to give back as an alumnus with his time and talent. Karen Owen, his wife, is also a Murray State alumna and former president of the Murray State University Alumni Association. The pair divide their time between homes in Marshall County and Brentwood, Tennessee, as well as keeping up with the lives of their five children.

"After 25 years of marriage, I continue to marvel at Joe's leadership skills," said Karen Owen. "With his quiet demeanor and big heart, one might not visualize Joe as a risk taker, but I assure you, he rarely turns a blind eye to a challenging opportunity. Regardless of the depth of the challenge, Joe embraces each opportunity with a sense of confidence, responsibility and passion — and particularly enjoys business ventures that help other people in return."

The Murray State University Alumni Association is proud to recognize Joe Owen as a Distinguished Alumnus.

Owen will be honored at the Distinguished Alumni Awards Dinner on April 27 at 6 p.m. in the CFSB Center's Murray Room. During the banquet, he will have an opportunity to speak about his professional experiences and memories of Murray State. The banquet is open to the public and tickets are available for \$50 at murraystate.edu/distinguishedalumni.