RECOMMENDATION FOR HONORARY DEGREE, SIUE

Summary

The President, on the recommendation of the SIUE Chancellor, requests Board of Trustees approval to award an honorary Doctor of Humane Letters degree to Mr. John Simmons at the May 2014 SIUE commencement.

Rationale for Adoption

John Simmons has dedicated his life to helping others. After serving as an Army combat engineer for two years, he went to work with his father building houses. John’s father inspired him to become a lawyer and, within months, he enrolled at Southern Illinois University Edwardsville as a political science major. John served as Student Body President while at SIUE. He went on to earn his J.D. from Southern Methodist University School of Law in Dallas while working part-time representing non-profit organizations and churches.

In 1999, John founded the Simmons Firm, a small law office with seven employees dedicated to helping those who developed terminal cancer due to toxic exposures in the workplace. Under his leadership, the firm expanded to a national litigation firm with more than 200 employees, including more than 60 attorneys, spread among five offices in Alton, St. Louis, Chicago, Los Angeles and San Francisco. Today, the firm represents clients throughout the country in a range of practice areas.

Motivated by John’s core belief of giving back to the community, he and his firm made a joint $10.2 million pledge to help build the Simmons Cancer Institute at Southern Illinois University in Springfield. The cancer institute is a community-based patient care, research, education and outreach program created to improve cancer care for the citizens of central and southern Illinois.

Additionally, the firm and John’s family foundation have donated nearly $5 million to charities and events throughout the St. Louis region through the Simmons Employee Foundation.

John has served on numerous boards and foundations. He currently serves on the board of the St. Louis Zoo. He served on the SIU Board of Trustees for over 9 years and spent his final term as Chairman. During his tenure, he helped to increase campus diversity, raise salaries and, in the midst of economic hardship, develop effective capital campaigns. In 2004, Simmons donated $1 million to renovate the Edwardsville campus’s baseball complex and has also contributed significantly to the construction of a golf training facility.
Following the early success of his firm, John was recognized by the *St. Louis Business Journal* as one of St. Louis’ 40 Under 40. The award honors 40 early achievers based on accomplishments in their careers and work in the St. Louis community. He has also been selected as one of 40 Illinois Attorneys Under the Age of 40 to Watch, according to the *Chicago Lawyer Magazine*, and is rated as one of the Top 100 Trial Lawyers.

John recently received an AV rating from Martindale-Hubbell. An AV rating identifies a lawyer with very high to preeminent legal ability, and is a prestigious peer-reviewed analysis of John’s expertise, experience, integrity and overall professional excellence.

**Considerations Against Adoption**

University officials are aware of none.

**Constituency Involvement**

SIUE’s Committee for Honorary Degrees and Distinguished Service Awards and the Chancellor of Southern Illinois University Edwardsville have recommended this matter to the President.

**Resolution**

BE IT RESOLVED, by the Board of Trustees of Southern Illinois University in regular meeting assembled, that the honorary degree, Doctor of Humane Letters, be awarded to Mr. John Simmons at the May 2014 commencement, or some commencement thereafter, of Southern Illinois University Edwardsville.