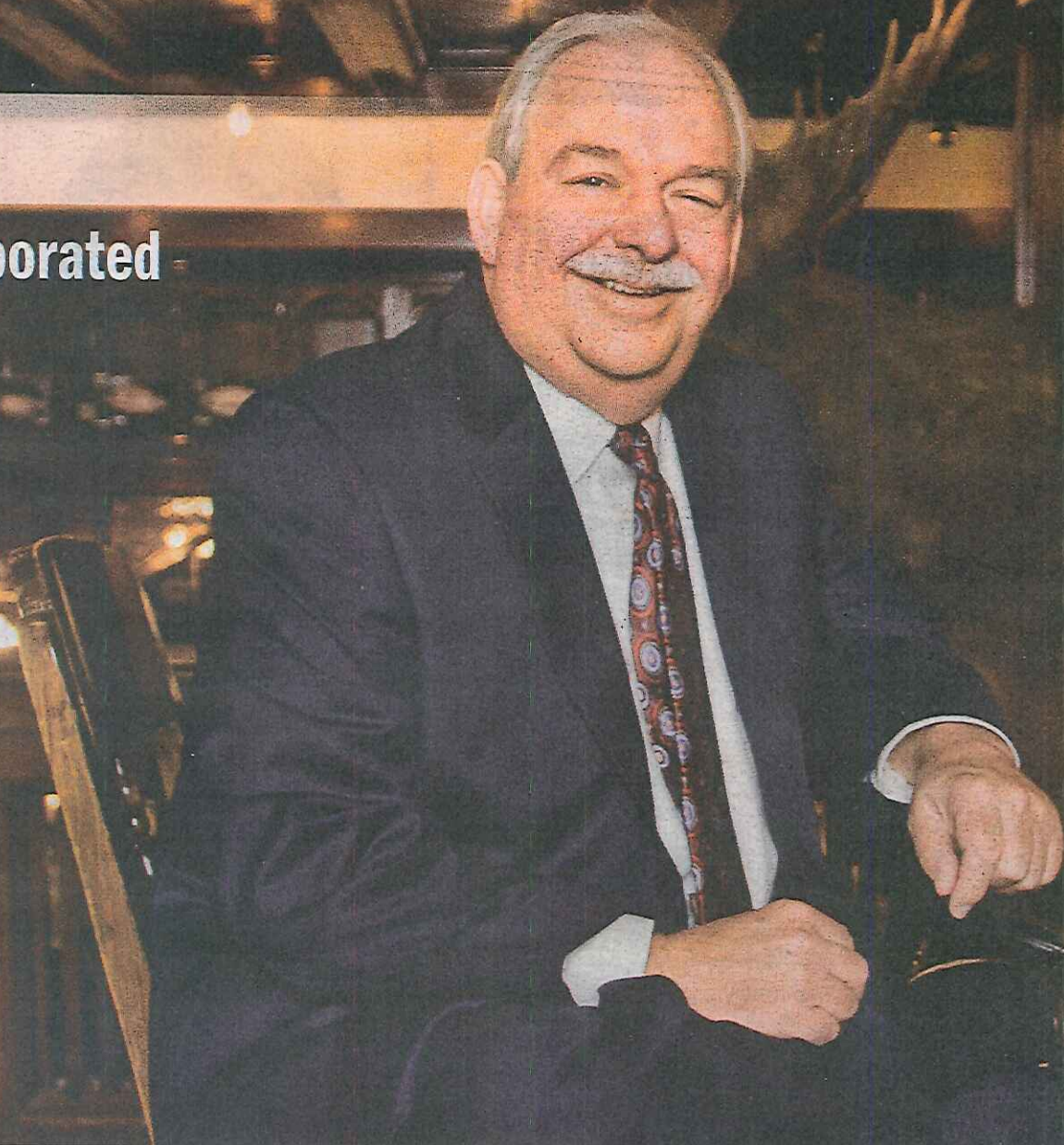


## Energy

## JON R. RAY

## Cox Smith Matthews Incorporated

Lawyer/Shareholder



## By Randy Lankford

**I**t's easy to get caught up in the get-it-done-yesterday world of a high-profile legal firm like Cox Smith Matthews Incorporated. But, over the course of a 34-year career, it's also easy to build up a stockpile of lighter moments.

Cox Smith shareholder Jon R. Ray is a wealth of both legal and not-so-legal anecdotes.

"One of our attorneys decided to observe 'walk to work day' one year," Ray recalls. "He brought in a suit the day before and hung it on the back of his door. Of course, by the time he walked to work the next day, in shorts and a t-shirt, someone had snatched his suit and hidden it."

Specializing in oil, gas and mineral law, Ray claims to work with both the finest people and worst scoundrels. The scoundrels are the ones who recreate themselves again and again as they set up one company after another with no more business plan than skimming off as much gravy as possible before the scheme collapses.

"When I was going to law school I worked for a very wealthy oil producing company that operated some very prolific fields along the Gulf Coast," Ray says. "Those high-dollar deals really fascinated me. That's what attracted me to the energy aspects of the law. That, and the science. I was a tech for a petroleum engineer and did a little engineering and geology work that really interested me."

Lately, legal work rising from the Eagle Ford Shale play has been keeping Ray and his colleagues busy. Law firms are generating title opinions — an essential step in the exploration process that assures the energy company that it has the full right to drill — and they also are representing land owners.

"Land owners have issues because the prices of properties have increased significantly since many leased their minerals," Ray says. "Some of these owners would like a chance to make their deals over again. Proper accounting for production royalties has historically been a source of controversy. The technology which makes all of this possible, the fracturing techniques, continue to be the source of worry among environmental activists — those concerned about water, and owners who simply intend to preserve their properties for future generations.

"I think the litigation will continue to be a fertile source of legal business, so long as the production revenues are significant," Ray says.

**Age:** 60

**Hometown:** Born in Little Rock, Arkansas, but my home town has been San Antonio

**Family:** Wife, Linnie; two daughters and one grandson

**High school:** Alamo Heights High School

**First job ever:** I was an assistant to a specialty printer who produced labels for pharmacy bottles out of his garage near my house. My responsibility was to operate the paper cutter, splitting the pages into individual labels. He also produced prescription stationery for physicians, which I cut to size and glued into pads.

**Higher Ed Degrees:** B.A. in Mathematics from Trinity University (1973); J.D. from St. Mary's University School of Law (1977)

**Moment you realized you wanted to be a lawyer:** I think the "moment" came during my first job after college. I worked for a public utility in the personnel department, in a job which was not particularly challenging. A colleague was accepted into law school on a minority-based scholarship but declined because he thought it would create a hardship on his family. I had a family too, but thought that we could tolerate that hardship for a chance at a professional career, even without a scholarship.

**When did you hit your stride?** I knew more about the law at the end of my first year of law school than at any time since. From a practicing standpoint, I think it took four to five years of experience before I was comfortable in advising clients.

**What makes your area of law interesting?** The large sums of money involved, the boom-and-

bust cycles and the science of the business all add to the fascination. The business is made up of some of the finest people and some of the worst scoundrels.

**What gets you out of bed in the morning?** The camaraderie and companionship of my colleagues. The Cox Smith energy team is made up of lawyers and staff who are all incredibly capable, intelligent and dedicated, but they are also jokesters, pranksters and truly funny.

**What keeps you up at night?** Transactions in the energy business move at a very fast pace. "Yesterday" is the deadline for most assignments. After many years, this becomes normal and is part of the excitement. Nonetheless, there occasionally is a confluence of important projects for important clients which, taken in the aggregate, begin to seem insurmountable and start to work on one's sleep patterns. From a more positive viewpoint, somehow I occasionally wake up with the solution to a problem I couldn't solve.

**Accomplishment most proud of:** Helping two daughters become respected professionals in their fields, and having the good fortune that they have remained fine individuals.

**Biggest mistake or learning experience:** Cutting corners on my own established practice standards to save a buck, making a mistake, and nearly having it blow up on me.

**Mentor(s):** Richard T. "Dick" Brady, for whose help I will be forever grateful. I have also learned a great deal from Dan G. Webster and Burley Smith.

RANDY LANKFORD is a San Antonio freelance writer.