



# *Alums "Making a Difference"*

John Hessel  
Aquinas  
Class of 1970

When a young John Hessel told his baseball coach at about the age of ten that he dreamed of becoming a police officer, Hessel's coach Jay Noser, then a Florissant police officer, had other ideas for his young player.

"I remember telling him at practice one day that I wanted to be a police officer like him. I remember him asking me if I was interested in being a police officer or if I was interested in the whole legal system," recalled Hessel, a Florissant native and 1970 graduate of St. Thomas Aquinas. "I told him the whole area of law enforcement interested me and it was he who suggested that I become a lawyer. From that moment on I wanted to become a lawyer."

And what a lawyer Hessel has become.

After graduating from Southeast Missouri State University in 1974 and St. Louis University Law School in 1977, Hessel went to work for the small law firm of Evans, Hoemeke and Casey. He eventually rose to the ranks of City Attorney for the cities of Florissant and Kirkwood, positions he still holds today. Hessel now works for Lewis Rice, a firm that merged with Evans, Hoemeke and Casey in 1981. In October, Hessel was named St. Louis Best Lawyers Municipal Lawyer of the Year for 2011. Best Lawyers compiles its list of outstanding attorneys by conducting exhaustive peer review surveys in which thousands of leading lawyers confidentially evaluate their peers.



"That was quite an honor to receive," commented Hessel, who currently lives in Kirkwood with his wife Pat. The couple have been married for 25 years and have three children. "To receive praise like that from your peers is the highest form of respect."

Hessel received plenty of respect during his four years at Aquinas. He was a standout athlete who competed in football, soccer, track and baseball and he was a member of the National Honor Society. "I had a wonderful time in high school," recalled Hessel, who played football at Southeast Missouri State. "I still see a lot of people from Aquinas and I am still friends with a lot of those people."

Hessel's siblings, Jim (1966), Joan (1968), Tom (1971) and Joe (1974) all attended Aquinas as well after growing up in the former St. Dismas Parish. When Hessel graduated from law school, then Florissant Mayor James Eagan offered Hessel a job.

"I worked for the city of Florissant while I was in high school and I lived near the mayor and played baseball with his son," explained Hessel. "The mayor called me after law school and

offered me a job.”

Hessel began as assistant city attorney and prosecuting attorney of Florissant and eventually became the city attorney in 1988. He started in the same positions for the city of Kirkwood in 1977 and became the Kirkwood City Attorney in 1985.

“Bob Hoemeke was the city attorney for Kirkwood when I was hired at Evans, Hoemeke and Casey and he hired me as his assistant in the city of Kirkwood,” said Hessel, who was at the Kirkwood City Council meeting two years ago where a tragic shooting took place that killed six people. “I tell people to take your worst nightmare and multiply it by any number you want and it wouldn’t come close to being as bad as that experience. It reminds me everyday that life is fragile. I don’t know why I was able to survive when six other people were not. It’s made me much more appreciative of what I have.”

For his actions during and after the shootings, Hessel was honored with the Medal of Valor from the group Crusade Against Crime.

“For them to recognize me is truly mind-boggling. The real heroes are the police and fire fighters who put their lives on the line everyday,” said Hessel, whose former baseball coach, Jay Noser, was one of those heroes. He was wounded in the line of duty and eventually passed away two years ago partially from the wounds he received. “Jay Noser was a real inspiration for me.”

“I hope I can continue to maintain the level of success I’ve been able to achieve,” added Hessel. “I’ve received a lot of recognition over the last four or five years. I just want to keep doing what I do.”