

John Lassiter Sanders '50

Leadership has many faces — smiling and encouraging, stern and warning, open and tolerant. As citizens, we are accustomed to seeing the faces of leadership in political advertisements and in television news sound bites. We are subject to the confusing of leadership and notoriety.

There is another face of leadership, less often seen. It is the face of that rare kind of leadership that emerges from the strength of character of the leader, the kind of leadership that grows through the consistent and careful exercise of competence and judgment. It is not leadership endorsed in an emotional spirit by a 51 percent majority. It is leadership without notoriety. It is the leadership that fits naturally, so evidently appropriate that the leader and the cause merge.

In North Carolina, the cause of good government cannot be understood without reference to the quiet, uncompromising, unceasing leadership of John Lassiter Sanders. For twenty-five years, he has been the director of the Institute of Government of The University of North Carolina, an institution described in an article in the *Raleigh News and Observer* a few years ago as “the largest single influence” for good government in the state. That is so in large part because of John Sanders. He is the catalyst that has made it possible for the 37 lawyers, economists, and administration and management specialists on the Institute faculty to serve the needs of public officials at all levels of government in North Carolina.

His direct contributions to good government have been immense. He was executive secretary of the Governor’s Commission on Education Beyond the High School, which produced recommendations that the General Assembly largely followed in creating the statewide system of community colleges and anticipating the incorporation of campuses into what was to become the 16-campus UNC System. He was chief advisor to the General Assembly in its first major redistricting of the modern one-person-one-vote era. He provided the legal assistance to the study commission that rewrote the state’s constitution, leading to the adoption of the 1971 document

that is now our fundamental state law. During a five-year break from his Institute director’s duties, he was vice-president for planning of the UNC System. He established the planning process for what was then a brand-new university system, he directed the legal studies of legal education and veterinary medicine, and he wrote the state plan for the elimination of racial segregation in higher education.

But more important than his direct contributions to good government has been his unfailing leadership, within the University and most especially within the Institute of Government. The elements of leadership came into place early. John was elected president of the UNC student body in 1950 and the following year received the John Johnston Parker, Jr. award for unique student leadership. He received his law degree here, clerked and practiced law for a time, and then, in 1962, after only six years on the Institute faculty, he was made its director. He succeeded a legend, Albert Coates, '18 who had founded the Institute and directed it for 31 years. John built upon the foundation over the next 30 years. In 1988 he received the University’s Thomas Jefferson Award, presented to the member of the UNC community who best exemplifies through personal influence and performance of duty the ideals and objectives of Jefferson.

The Institute of Government, the University, government throughout the state, and the people of John Sander’s native North Carolina are in his debt for his leadership of a quarter century.