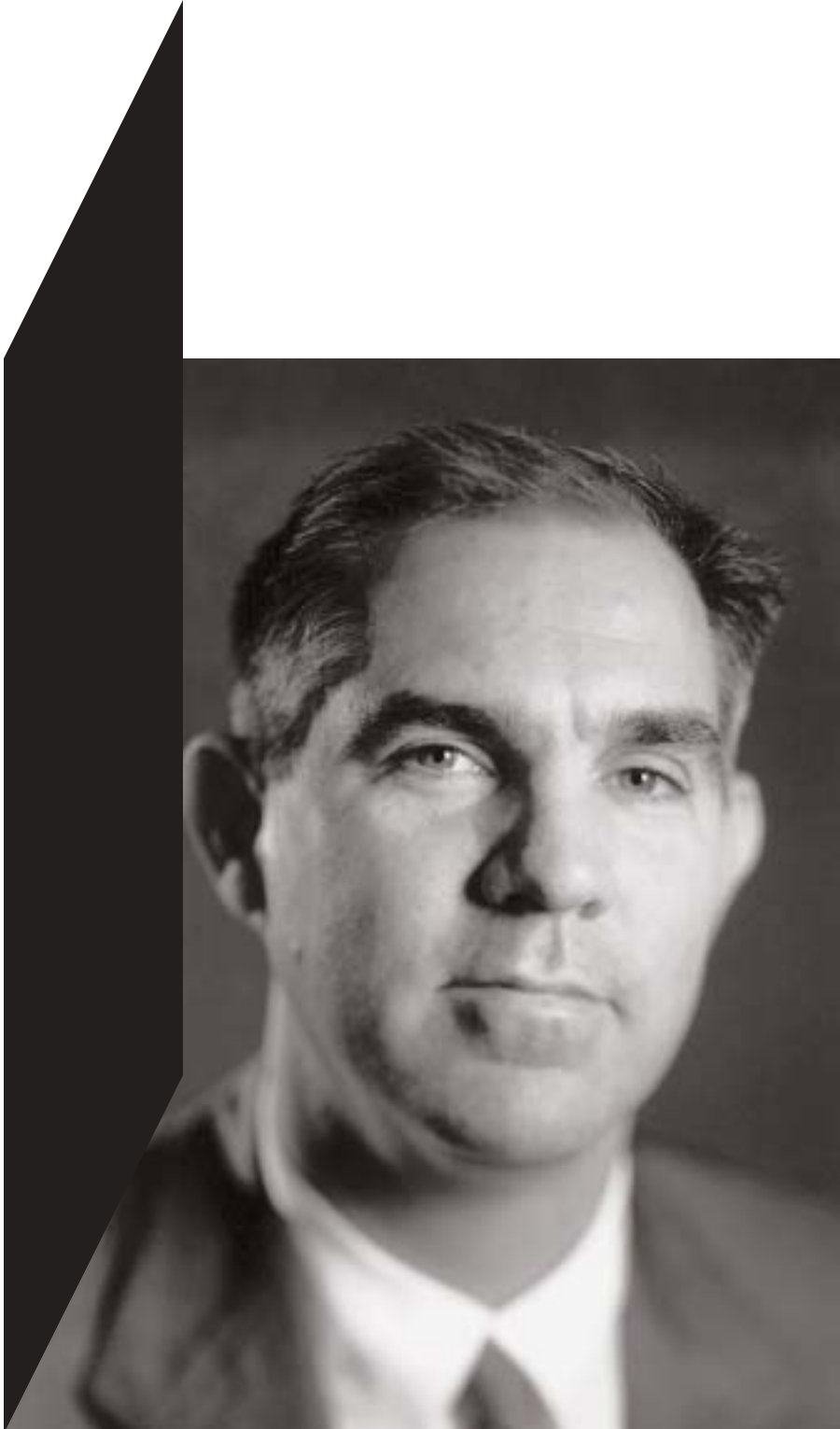


# O P E N I N G



by Edward L. Carter

JESSE L. RIDDLE understands the power of education. For Riddle, a 1988 graduate of the J. Reuben Clark Law School who now runs a multimillion-dollar debt recovery law firm in Sandy, Utah, the value of education is no different for a student at a prestigious university such as Oxford than it is for a student at a tiny high school started by a community of farmers in rural Mississippi.

Riddle has unique insights into such seemingly divergent schools: At the same time he serves on the board of regents at Oxford University's Harris Manchester College, Riddle also occupies a position on the school board of Centreville Academy in Centreville, Mississippi.

"Serving on the Mississippi school board is no less important than serving on the Manchester college board at Oxford," says Riddle. "Somebody has to step up and make a difference."

At age 13 Riddle was forced to move from his mother's home in Texas to his grandmother's modest trailer house in

PHOTO BY BRADLEY SLADE

# D O O R S

J E S S E L . R I D D L E

Centreville, where he eventually graduated from Centreville Academy in a class of 25. He attended Louisiana State University before serving a Church mission in Hawaii.

Upon his return to the mainland, Riddle enrolled at BYU and studied speech, rhetoric, and English. He engrossed himself in the speeches of famous and infamous leaders such as Winston Churchill, Hitler, Franklin D. Roosevelt, Martin Luther King, George Washington, and Abraham Lincoln.

"I was impressed that people could take words and motivate other people to do certain things," Riddle says.

After earning a law degree, Riddle practiced at a firm in Oregon before taking time off to write a travel guidebook. In 1994 he founded Riddle & Associates, which has grown quickly to 60 employees and represents on a nationwide basis clients such as DIRECTV, Kroger, AutoZone, and Eddie Bauer.

Riddle & Associates processes an incredible volume of work: the firm places two million telephone calls per month and regularly handles hundreds of thousands of debt collection accounts simultaneously. Riddle himself has become an expert on the federal Debt Collection Practices Act, a topic about which he speaks regularly to industry groups.

Riddle remains heavily involved in devising firm strategy and maintaining client relations, but he also devotes significant resources to various educational causes. Riddle and his wife, Lisa, fund two full-tuition scholarships for Polynesian students to attend the J. Reuben Clark Law School.

Riddle has traveled to BYU—Hawaii to propose establishing a prelaw program, and he took several employees of Riddle & Associates with him to Mississippi to install computer and telephone systems that he donated to Centreville Academy.

"Jesse and Lisa's contributions to our school have been unparalleled," said Bill Hurst, headmaster of Centreville Academy, located 60 miles north of Baton Rouge. "Jesse and Lisa represent the Christlike attitude of giving freely unto others, especially those less fortunate."

Riddle's involvement with Oxford originated at a conference he attended there in December 2001. While at Oxford he met Lady Mary Soames, Churchill's daughter ("Here's a kid from Mississippi meeting Churchill's daughter—think about that!" Riddle marvels), former British prime minister Sir Edward Heath, and Manchester College principal Dr. Ralph Waller.

Riddle and Waller hit it off famously, holding an impromptu but in-depth discussion about British philosopher and religious leader John Wesley. In the spring of 2002 Waller visited Jesse and Lisa Riddle and their five children in Sandy. Riddle had by that time accepted a position on the board of regents of Manchester College, and Waller brought a copy of the *London Times* announcing Riddle's appointment.

"My name was in the *London Times*, and it wasn't in the crime section," Riddle jokes. On a more serious note, he says, "It's great to be around people who care about education."

In addition to attending regular board of regents meetings at Oxford, Riddle has committed to attend as many monthly meetings as possible of the Centreville Academy board. Although the two schools are worlds apart in terms of scope and reputation, Riddle finds many similarities.

"They both have financial constraints," he says. "They both worry about the curriculum."

When it comes to the worries of a school administrator, Riddle may be just learning. But when it comes to the potential of education to lift and inspire, Riddle has mastered the lesson. Now he's sharing that lesson with students in rural Mississippi, at Oxford, and at the J. Reuben Clark Law School.

"Who will be the leaders?" Riddle asks. "The leaders will be the ones with education."

