

## AMBASSADOR JOHN V. ROOS THE NEW DIPLOMAT

By Sharon Driscoll

YOU NEVER KNOW HOW ALL

THE DIFFERENT PIECES IN YOUR LIFE ARE GOING TO COME TOGETHER," says Ambassador John V. Roos '80 (BA '77). • A Silicon Valley heavy hitter, Roos should know. He was at the pinnacle of his legal career when he resigned the CEO position at Wilson Sonsini Goodrich & Rosati in August to take up an appointment as ambassador to Japan. Trading venture deals for affairs of state, Roos is making the kind of midlife change that many lawyers only dream of. But while building a successful legal career, Roos was also building a parallel political career—putting in thousands of hours to support Democratic Party candidates who inspired him. And in both his legal and political careers one characteristic stands out: his willingness to take chances. After taking a chance on three unsuccessful Democratic presidential candidates, the fourth one—Barack Obama—proved the charm. However, when Roos appeared at the Senate confirmation hearing, it was clear that his past presidential hopefuls—Senator John Kerry, former senator Bill Bradley, and former vice president Walter Mondale—had a part to play in his appointment as ambassador, each weighing in to return the support he had given to them.

Roos was off to a successful start after law school when he joined O'Melveny & Myers in the firm's Los Angeles office as an associate trial lawyer on the partner fast track. But by 1985 he could see that something exciting was happening in Silicon Valley—and he wanted to be part of it. He moved back to the Bay Area, joining a small, boutique firm in Palo Alto called Wilson Sonsini, this time as a corporate lawyer. Switching practice areas meant starting the partnership track all over again, which is what he did.

"You shouldn't worry about changing direction or taking a step backwards in your career. It's much more important to be in the right position—the previous experience isn't wasted," says Roos.

The company caught the tech startup wave and over the next 25 years became the premier legal firm in the Valley, growing from 50 employees to more than 1,500 worldwide. And Roos was in the thick of it, helping the firm to represent young companies such as Google, Hewlett Packard, and Pixar. After his appointment as CEO in 2004, he steered Wilson Sonsini beyond the burst tech bubble toward a broader client portfolio

and a global presence. Today, he's proud that a key focus of his tenure was recently recognized when the firm was listed as having the most diverse group of lawyers. *Working Mother* magazine similarly named Wilson Sonsini as one of the "50 Best Law Firms for Women" in 2008 and 2009.

While building his legal career, Roos also made time for community service. He ran for and won a seat on the San Mateo-Foster City School District Board of Trustees in 1991 and again in 1995. He also served in various capacities at both Stanford University and Stanford Law School—most recently as a member of the law school's Dean's Advisory Council.

At the same time, Roos pursued his passion for politics. As an undergraduate at Stanford, he studied arms control negotiations and the Japanese political system under Daniel Okimoto and Hubert Marshall and worked with Rudolph Sher from the electrical engineering department on a thesis examining safeguards against the threat of nuclear terrorism. Just after receiving his BA, he started the Stanford Speech Institute, a three-week summer debate camp for high school students. At law school, he was a member of the *Stanford Law Review* and graduated Order of the Coif. He was inspired by IP law with Paul Goldstein, constitutional law with Gerald Gunther and Paul Brest, and criminal law with Tony Amsterdam. And he put his debating skills to the test in moot court competition, making it to the final round in his last year.

On the national scene, Roos took a leave of absence from O'Melveny & Myers in 1984 to work on Mondale's presidential bid. That the ticket was unsuccessful didn't discourage Roos. He continued to work on presidential campaigns including those of Bradley and Kerry. Along the way he gained a reputation as a rainmaker—both at Wilson Sonsini and in the Democratic Party. He heard then Senator-elect Barack Obama's keynote address at the 2004 Democratic National Convention

and he was immediately impressed by the newcomer's message and passion. When Obama decided to make a bid for the party's nomination for the 2008 campaign, Roos co-chaired the California financing operation and supported his candidate enthusiastically. "He's a unique political figure and a unique leader," says Roos. "There wasn't any question in my mind that I wanted to support him and, though at the time a long shot, I thought he had a real chance of winning the election. His message was the right one."

During the long campaign, Roos formed a deep bond with and commitment to the candidate. And, while the domestic agenda is sometimes the subject of heated debate, Roos sees immediate results of President Obama's election on the international front.

"I believed from the start that Obama's

the former presidential candidates of his past supporting his nomination. Senator Kerry made a strong case for Roos's abilities to translate his legal experience to the new role. "As the CEO of one of Silicon Valley's top international law firms, Mr. Roos has deep insights into the intersection of science, technology, and the global economy," Kerry said in his opening statement. "Having seen firsthand the fruits of U.S.-Japan cooperation in these areas, he is well positioned to broaden and deepen our collaboration on issues like climate change, energy security, commerce and trade, as well as global health. Leading a global law firm with more than 1,500 employees in eight offices from San Francisco to Shanghai, Mr. Roos has demonstrated his skills as a leader, diplomat, and problem solver."

Now living in the historic ambas-

role. As the United States and Japan approach the 50th anniversary of their alliance and each country adjusts to new leadership, Roos is confident of his abilities to meet any challenge.

"Diplomacy is all about relationships," he says, noting that approximately 30 percent of all diplomatic appointments are to non-diplomatic career individuals. "The practice of law has been valuable preparation for this position, as was running a law firm at the center of innovation and technology."

Getting up to speed, he has already found he shares his Stanford University education with Japan's new Prime Minister Yukio Hatoyama (PhD '76, MS '73, MS '72). And he's excited about the possibilities ahead. "These are the two largest economies in the world. What each of us does and how we

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JOHN ROOS '80 (BA '77) AT SWEARING IN WITH JUDGE THELTON HENDERSON, WIFE SUSAN (BA '78) AND SON DAVID

election would change our image in the world overnight and I believe he has accomplished that," says Roos.

The Senate confirmation hearing was something of a reunion for Roos—

sador's residence in Tokyo with his family—the same house where the Emperor of Japan surrendered to General MacArthur at the end of World War II—Roos is settling into his new

coordinate are absolutely critical to global security and the economy, particularly as we recover from this severe recession," says Roos. "Japan is playing an incredibly important role in the world in various areas. Whether it's in climate change and renewable energy, in providing assistance in Iraq, Afghanistan, or Pakistan, in dealing with pirates in Somalia, or with a pandemic—Japan is our partner. I look forward to strengthening our ties as two nations and my own relationship with the Japanese people."

As to how a onetime trial lawyer wound up with this incredible opportunity, and the confidence of the president of the United States, his answer is simple: "Work hard. Take chances. But do things that are important to you—there's always time. Both of the firms I worked for were very supportive of efforts of its attorneys and staff to contribute to society and the community. It's an important part of the legal tradition." **SL**