

Firm's Managing Partner took a risk that is yielding long-term benefits for its clients and staff

By Tom Kirvan

When Sid Degan made the decision to form his own law firm in 1991, he admitted that he took “an enormous leap of faith” that ultimately would produce several unexpected benefits.

Foremost, the firm that he co-founded 32 years ago in New Orleans with Ed Blanchard now is known as Degan, Blanchard & Nash and counts nearly 50 attorneys with a sterling legal reputation in the areas of insurance defense and coverage, commercial litigation, admiralty and maritime, construction, toxic tort, energy, accident, life, disability, environmental, professional liability, health care, property, and public entity law. It also is spread across three offices in Louisiana.

“When I contemplated forming the firm, I never imagined that we would be where we are today in terms of size and the scope of our practice,” said Degan, a native of New Orleans and an alumnus of Tulane University School of Law in the Crescent City.

The decision to begin a new firm, risky as it was back then when the U.S. was the midst of an economic recession, also allowed Degan and Blanchard to avoid being caught up in the eventual dissolution of the firm where they began their legal careers, a contentious break-up that took years to fully unravel.

From a distance, it also may have served as a lesson on how Degan wanted to help shape his new firm, focusing on a two-sentence commitment to its clients.

“Our philosophy is simple: provide the highest quality legal services in the most cost-effective and efficient manner possible. We accept nothing less than excellence, and our attorneys are committed to maintaining the highest standards of practice.”

The two-fold promise also incorporates a belief in the value of “our efforts to recruit, retain, and develop careers of people from diverse backgrounds,” according to Degan, who has served as Managing Partner of the firm since its founding.

In fact, Degan, Blanchard & Nash recently earned “Mansfield Rule-Plus” certification, signifying its deepening commitment to diversity in the legal workplace.



The goal of the Mansfield Rule program is to boost the representation of diverse lawyers in law firm leadership by broadening the pool of candidates considered for those roles and opportunities, Degan explained. The certification process has helped more than 70 recently certified midsize law firms across the country to significantly increase opportunities for attorneys from traditionally under-represented backgrounds and to build the institutional framework necessary to ensure each firm's continued progress to increase diversification.

“We are very proud of achieving the certification, and it embodies our underlying commitment to the principles of diversity, equity, and inclusion,” said Degan, noting that half of the firm's attorneys are female, which for a firm its size, may be the highest percentage in the state.

“Our entire firm pulled together in support of this initiative, making sure that we met our certification goal and that it becomes part of our culture for years to come,” he added.

Culture is a word that Degan uses with some frequency, and likely stems from being raised in a family that valued faith, hard work, education, and equal justice. His father was an executive with Ford Motor Co. who was responsible for directing the shipment of parts to the automaker's facilities in the Southern Hemisphere. His mother was a homemaker, chiefly responsible for raising the couple's three children, including Degan's sister – now the head of a New Orleans advertising agency – and his brother, who lives in Texas and works in the investment field.

After earning a bachelor's degree from the University of New Orleans and then his juris doctor from Tulane Law, Degan was hired by a respected local firm, where he quickly became a valued partner. But despite his partnership status and the fact that he was living a “comfortable” and uncomplicated life, Degan had an itch to do something more in his career.

“The idea of running my own firm had been on my mind for several years and I decided to act on it, leaving an established

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firm with no guarantee of what the future would hold," Degan recalled. "I had the good fortune to associate with some wonderful attorneys who helped us develop a client base across multiple practice areas that we have expanded methodically over the years. Early on we were fortunate to add Foster Nash as an associate and he eventually became a named partner in helping us grow as a firm."

A skilled litigator, Degan also relishes his management and mentoring responsibilities as head of the firm, doing his best to regularly impart a timeless piece of wisdom to each attorney he guides.

"I tell those who join our firm to treat each client as if they are your only client," he said. "It's the best piece of advice I can give."

He also encourages members of the firm to become active in Primerus™ and to avail themselves of the "many educational programs and learning opportunities" that the organization offers.

"As a firm, we have benefited greatly from Primerus™ and the relationships we have built with other members," said Degan, who has been a frequent speaker at Primerus™ Defense Institute meetings and conferences over the years. "The quality of the law firms is second to none, as their attorneys represent some of the finest clients in the business world. Primerus™ has opened doors for us that otherwise we would not have had a chance to open."

The law is a subject that has carved out a special place in the Degan family. His wife, Nancy Scott Degan, is the former Managing Shareholder for the New Orleans and Mandeville offices and member of the Executive Committee of Baker Donelson, one of the top 100 largest law firms in the U.S. with a team of more than 650 attorneys. A magna cum laude graduate of Loyola University College of Law in New Orleans, she chaired Baker Donelson's Business Litigation Group for nine years and has been active with the American Bar Association throughout her career, earning the distinction in 2019 from the ABA for being among "100 Women Who Inspire Us."

"Nancy is one of the most accomplished female attorneys in the country and is a former ABA Chair of the Section of Litigation," Degan said proudly. "She has also served as the Chair of the Standing Committee on the Federal Judiciary and was responsible for vetting all federal judicial nominees across the country. Nancy had to personally vet United States Supreme Court nominees and testify before the Senate Judiciary

Committee during the confirmation hearing. She is a remarkable lawyer and an even better person."

The couple's younger daughter, Emily Degan Vorhoff, also graduated from Loyola College of Law magna cum laude after earning a business administration degree in accounting and German from the University of Notre Dame. A CPA, Emily worked for Deloitte before deciding to attend law school. Recently married to her husband Jed, a senior portfolio manager for a bank in New Orleans, she now is an associate with Jones Walker, focusing on mergers and acquisitions work in the firm's Corporate Practice Group.

Their older daughter, Alison Degan Tem, is a graduate of the United States Naval Academy and served as a combat pilot in Iraq and Syria, flying assorted night-time missions in support of allied forces in the Middle East. Alison recently obtained a master's degree from Johns Hopkins in space engineering with a perfect 4.0 average. She and her husband, Mike Tem, also a United States Naval Academy graduate and a Navy pilot with combat experience who has recently worked with NATO, are based in Norfolk, Va. with their two children.

"My wife and I are incredibly proud of both our daughters for what they have accomplished in school and now in their careers," said Degan, who has taken on leadership roles in a number of community and charitable organizations over the course of his legal career.

One cause in particular has been dear to his heart – the American Cancer Society's Patrick F. Taylor Hope Lodge.

To many who have been impacted by the disease, the Patrick F. Taylor Hope Lodge is a "unique 'home away from home' for those who need warm, caring, no-cost accommodations during their cancer treatment at a New Orleans medical facility."

In recent years, Degan is former Chair to the American Cancer Society's state board and a current board member who has involved a host of other attorneys from his firm with the organization in fund-raising efforts. It is his way of saying thanks for what his family experienced when his wife and their daughter, Alison, were diagnosed with cancer and underwent successful treatment.

"Cancer becomes very personal then," Degan said of his wife and daughter's bouts with cancer and the many uncertainties it suddenly brought into their lives. "As a spouse and parent, it's a word you never want to hear."