

Winter 2024

Paradigm™



President's Podium:

A 'storm' gathers
on the horizon

Finding common ground

Four attorneys once
walked the police beat

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The Primerus Paradigm™

Winter 2024



About Our Cover

Now more than ever, a steadying hand is needed to find some solid ground as we confront some of society's most pressing problems.



Beyond Bounds

Winter retreats tempt the tastes of all comers

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Every lawyer in Primerus™ shares a commitment to a set of common values known as the Six Pillars:

- Integrity
- Excellent Work Product
- Reasonable Fees
- Continuing Legal Education
- Civility
- Community Service

For a full description of these values, please visit primerus.com

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Articles in this publication are intended for informational purposes only and do not convey or constitute legal advice.

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Common Ground

A bedrock principle appears pivotal to promote healing in today's fractured society

By Tom Kirvan and Brian Cox

There are sticky questions making the political rounds about how and why the concepts of cooperation and compromise have eroded so dramatically in countries around the world.

Some observers believe the slide can be traced to one word – fear – and how power-hungry politicians and government officials pounce on that feeling of

insecurity to sow seeds of distrust in our most fundamental institutions.

Others conclude that the principal threats to consensus-building are generally home-grown and are stoked by unfounded claims on social media, which makes stamping them out particularly challenging for those committed to the truth and to the right of self-determination.

Free speech has long been viewed as the bedrock of a functioning democracy, and yet it appears clear that the political animosity prevalent across society is serving as the enemy of unity.

To understand the social and political dynamics of today, we must determine how millions of citizens became inoculated against the truth, causing

seismic shifts in how we deal with the twin plagues of intolerance and bigotry.

In part, the distrust can be traced to how easily people can silo themselves in echo chambers when it comes to their viewing and listening habits, further contributing to the fracturing and divisions of today. At virtually every level of government, there has been a willingness to plow through procedural guardrails without hesitancy

and a desire to turn a blind eye to the traditional rules of civility and decorum.

So, how did we arrive in the land of seemingly unending conflict – and more importantly, how do we find our way into a world of peaceful coexistence?

Four members of the international community of Primerus have some thoughts on the subject, representing

a diverse cross-section of attorneys from around the globe. They come from China, Germany, Mexico, and the U.S., and include George Fu of the Watson & Band Law Offices in Shanghai; Dr. Eckart Broedermann of the Broedermann Jahn law firm in Hamburg; Iker Dieguez of Cacheaux Cavazos & Newton in Mexico City; and Joel Collins of Collins & Lacy in Columbia, South Carolina. [▶](#)

George Fu



A native of Shanghai, the largest city in China at nearly 27 million people, attorney George Fu began his legal career in the judicial realm after studying abroad in the United States and the former Soviet Union.

His worldly experience in those countries has been instrumental to his success as an intellectual property lawyer and senior founding partner with Watson & Band Law Offices in Shanghai, a coastal city that is the global commercial hub for the most populous country in the world.

The firm, which Fu helped form in 1995 with two other attorneys, now boasts 13 offices in Mainland China, along with a few satellite offices. The firm's dramatic growth over the past three decades has coincided with the surge in foreign economic activity in China, according to the 68-year-old Fu.

Fu, whose practice focuses on all aspects of IP law as well as arbitration and litigation matters, said his firm's decision to join Primerus several years ago was prompted by a desire to expand and strengthen its global network of legal

contacts principally for the benefit of the Chinese companies it represents.

"We represent a number of companies who do business abroad and we wanted the ability to refer them to law firms worldwide," Fu explained, adding that "we had to make ourselves ready" when asked to provide legal contacts on a global basis.

His involvement has included opportunities to attend the 2022 Primerus International Summit in Washington, D.C. and two Annual Meetings of the Association of Corporate Counsel, one



George Fu
Senior Partner
Watson & Band

of which took place in Las Vegas in 2022 followed by the 2023 program in San Antonio last October. On a professional level, Fu viewed the three meetings as "opportunities for engagement" that he found interesting and enriching.

Common business interests, he said, can serve as the glue that keeps Western countries and China bound together even when political interests diverge. To quell tensions on that front, Fu believes that there must be a general acceptance of each other's differences to promote positive relations and constructive engagement.

"The Chinese political system is different than the U.S.," Fu said matter-of-factly. "That's the reality and I make no comment on what is good and what is bad, just that they are different. China is a Communist Party dominated government. . . You cannot separate the (Communist) Party from the people itself. They are just one entity. There is no veil to pierce. . . That is the reality," he said, noting that it would be counter-productive for either country to insist on systemic change.

Relatedly, Fu is of the belief that improved relations also hinge on a better overall understanding of Western and Chinese cultures.

"The core culture in the United States and Western countries is very much an individual-driven society," said Fu. "In China, the culture is more like a family-driven society. The cultures make it different. Is freedom important? Yes. Are human rights important? Yes. But at this point, the average person in China places more importance on their family and their job . . . The pursuits are different . . . and the mindsets are different between our two cultures."

Aside from time spent on his studies in the U.S., Fu also has family ties to the American West Coast where his daughter is a doctor in Portland, Oregon.

Fu and his wife, a retired teacher, met during college and celebrated their 40th wedding anniversary in 2023. They do their best each year to periodically visit their daughter and two grandchildren (ages 4 and 2) in the U.S., trips that bring "great joy into our lives," said Fu.

He and several of his legal colleagues recently spent nearly a month traveling abroad, meeting with clients in various cities in the U.S., the United Kingdom, France, and other European Union countries. It was an exhausting trip, he


admitted, but it also served as a reminder of the importance that individual business relationships can have in creating improved international relations.

"You cannot avoid competition," Fu said of the sometimes-tense relations between China and Western countries, particularly in the technology industry. "But we still need cooperation and collaboration to deal with climate issues, environmental issues. We should work together on these matters."

Recent evidence of the fruits that come from a cooperative approach occurred when Chinese officials announced efforts to curb the harmful effects of plastic waste by encouraging the production of bamboo-related items and packages instead, Fu said, noting a twofold benefit.

"The Chinese Central Government is in the process of adopting a policy that is more pro-environment, abandoning the plastic stuff while encouraging the use of bamboo materials," Fu indicated. "The policy will be more environmentally friendly and also will economically help in remote, under-developed areas where there is a lot of bamboo.

"China and the United States can have a lot of collaboration in this effort, which will be good for both countries,"

Fu declared. 



Joel Collins



Joel Collins
Partner
Collins & Lacy, P.C.

Fresh from his 80th birthday celebration in early December, Joel Collins was poised to give a final exam to students in his course on the U.S. Constitution at the South Carolina Honors College. Traditionally, the class has been one of the most popular courses at the Honors College despite its academic rigor and the accordingly high expectations of its professor.

"I expect excellence out of them and, for the most part, they deliver," Collins said of those who take his class.

The lessons they learn from Collins, a distinguished trial lawyer whose gift for storytelling has captivated juries and colleagues for decades, can have a positive spillover effect for those concerned about the state of our body politic.

For years, Collins has been pained that many students entering college lack a basic understanding of civics – the study of government and the rights and responsibilities of citizenship.

According to Collins, there is a federal statute that requires schools to "teach the U.S. Constitution" to promote a greater understanding and appreciation for the document that is at the heart of the American system of government.

"Plenty of schools don't comply with the law for reasons spoken and unspoken, but that doesn't excuse them from failing to educate students about a document that is critical to our way of life," Collins indicated. "We need to re-double our efforts to teach the Constitution, otherwise we end up with a populace that lacks the tools to know fact from fiction. The educationally vulnerable can easily fall prey to misinformation.

"Many people have lost faith in our institutions, many of which are pivotal to maintaining the social contract that democracy offers," Collins added. "This type of thinking feeds the authoritarian impulses of those with extremist views."

While a well-educated public is essential to a properly functioning government, Collins also believes that it "must go hand-in-hand with virtuous behavior," a concept that has been lost amidst the constant political bickering at all levels of government.

"We need to place special emphasis on choosing people of courage who have the moral fortitude to fight for the causes of justice, equality, and human dignity," added Collins, a past president of the prestigious American Board of Trial Advocates (ABOTA).

"We also need to shine a modern light on the enduring principles of self-discipline,


compassion, responsibility, courage, perseverance, honesty, and loyalty. If we do, we have a chance to bridge the deep divides and to end the needless ideological debates that stifle progress."

Collins, a U.S. Army veteran of the Vietnam War, counts patriotism among our most treasured virtues, a fact that has gotten lost in the muck of today's political posturing and squabbling. One of America's greatest patriots, he noted, was the man who first guided the nation.

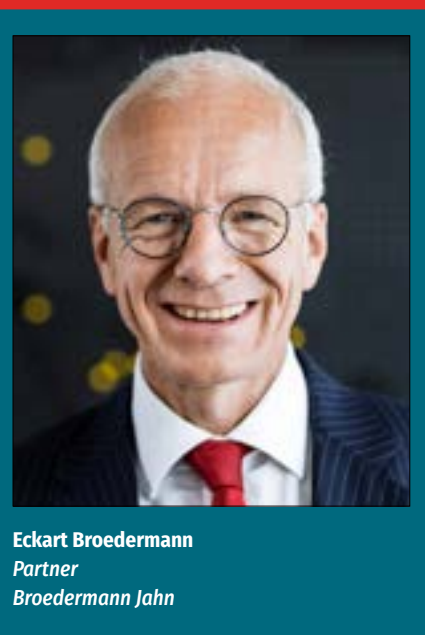
That president, of course, was George Washington, the so-called "Father of Our Country," whom Collins ranks as the finest president this country had to offer.

"He set a great precedent of being a president of class, restraint, excellent judgment, and tolerance for the opinion of others," said Collins of Washington, who served two terms in office and in affairs of government tried to be above reproach.

"We can always draw inspiration from him," said Collins who added an immortal quote from Winston Churchill, one of the great leaders and orators of the 20th century.

"The most important virtue is courage," Churchill said during the dark days of World War II. "It is the virtue that makes all the other virtues possible." 

Eckart Broedermann



Eckart Broedermann
Partner
Broedermann Jahn

Shortly after Russia invaded Ukraine in February 2022, Professor Eckart Broedermann and his wife, Silke, decided it was their duty to do something about the human tragedy that was unfolding as a cascade of Ukrainian refugees fled for safety.

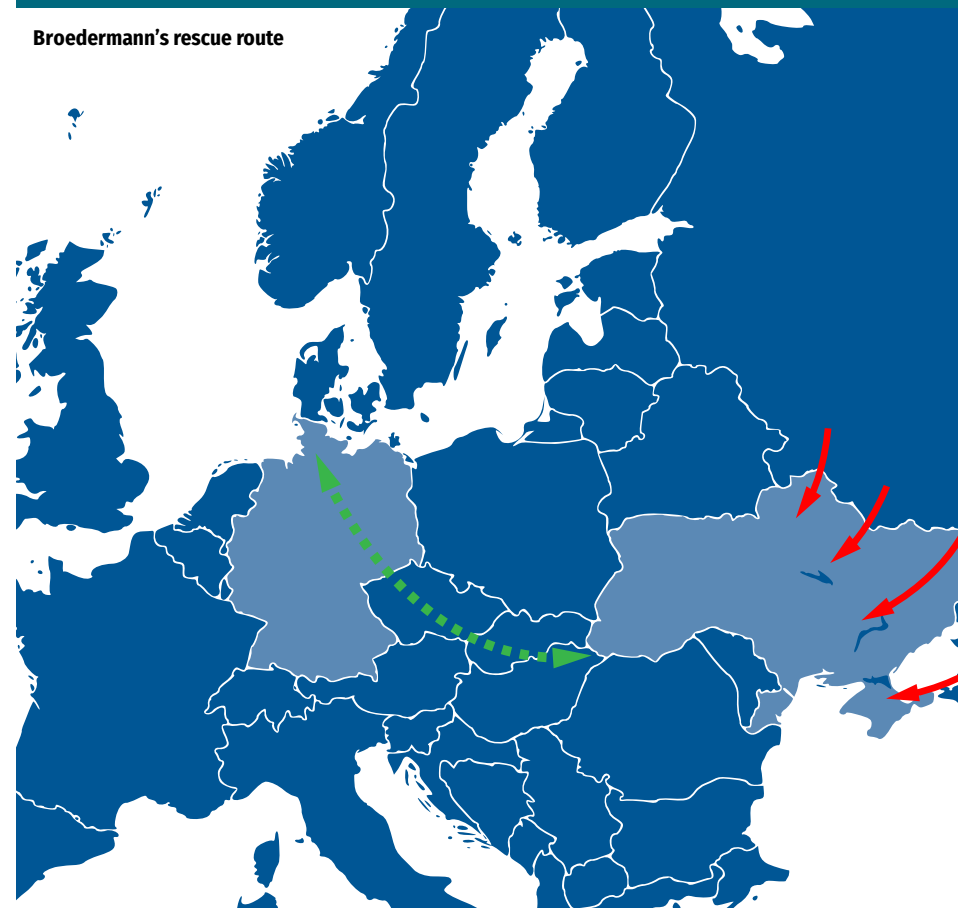
Their decision to become involved was motivated on a neighboring and personal level, Broedermann said at the time.

“We were informed that the Ukrainian family of our son’s girlfriend was suddenly fleeing for their lives, joining thousands of other war refugees seeking safety at the borders of neighboring countries,” Broedermann indicated just weeks after the invasion occurred.

So, within a matter of days, Broedermann and his wife would make an arduous 14-hour drive across Germany and the Czech Republic en route to the Hungarian-Ukrainian border, where they would

welcome five Ukrainian refugees, including a mother, three children, and an aunt. The foreigners were soon on their way to the Broedermann home in Hamburg in northern Germany, a haven far from the shelling and bombing that Russia had unleashed on its neighbor.

For months, the group of five refugees became part of the Broedermann family, enjoying the safety and comforts of the German couple’s home while also



gaining firsthand appreciation for Western kindness, generosity, and hospitality.

In addition, Broedermann began a campaign in Hamburg to discard the use of the term “refugee,” claiming that it further stigmatizes them as “second class citizens” in their adopted country.

Said Broedermann: “A better term would be ‘People Seeking Protection,’ which would help treat them as our guests, and with the honor and respect that they deserve.”

Such a mindset is reflective of Broedermann’s approach to life and the law. Broedermann, who founded the Broedermann Jahn law firm in 1996, is a renowned international business law author and expert. For more than 25 years, he has taught pro bono at the University of Hamburg in Germany.

His time in academia and in the legal profession has given him a unique perspective on how to facilitate constructive change in a world fraught with peril and with public figures who do not hide their desire to tear at the fragile fabric of government.

“The underlying problem is that whatever the type of state – democracy or otherwise – there always are a few people who cannibalize the system for their own benefit or to maintain their grip on power,” said Broedermann, noting that Russia is “financing much of its war effort” by exploiting the vast natural resources of the land it occupies in Ukraine.

Broedermann said his “contributions to peace” come principally in the form of a legal commentary on the general “Principles of International Commercial Contracts,” published by UNIDROIT, an intergovernmental organization whose objective is to harmonize private law

across countries. He has been heavily involved in the writing and updating of the 676-page book over the past 3 years in hopes that the UNIDROIT Principles will serve as a blueprint for economic cooperation among countries around the globe.

Written in English, by the non-native speaker Broedermann, his book has already been translated to Chinese, and is currently being translated to Spanish and French. Further translation projects relate to Japanese, Portuguese, Vietnamese, and Arabic, according to Broedermann, all in an effort to bring the world closer together through uniform rules and model laws.

The compilation and development of the international contract principles by UNIDROIT is possibly the most significant achievement of the international legal community since the year 534 A.D., said Broedermann, when Byzantine Emperor Justinian implemented a complete collection of all Roman law so that it was more uniform in its application. The principles of contracting further evolved in the English Common Law and then in the American Uniform Commercial Code, which is grounded on “good faith and fair dealing,” Broedermann indicated. The UNIDROIT Principles quasi transfer this underlying general principle of good faith and fair dealing to international contracts, according to Broedermann.

Combined, those “good faith” business principles contain the promise of a potentially peaceful coexistence among all nations, according to Broedermann, who earned an LL.M. from Harvard Law School in 1983.

“We all think in boxes, and this takes us out of boxes, but with a tool that is easy to comprehend and to use,” said Broedermann.

Iker Dieguez



Iker Dieguez
Partner
Cacheaux Cavazos & Newton

One individual's truth is not an absolute.

Change is inevitable because without change there is no life.

Effective communication is difficult, but essential.

Winning does not mean imposing.

These aphorisms encapsulate a foundational philosophy attorney Iker Dieguez employs when it comes to resolving conflict. As a bilingual business lawyer working on cross-border ventures, Dieguez has given a lot of time and thought to how best to navigate through conflict in order to attain an end goal.

"Every single contract is a result of a conflict between two positions that resolve into a middle ground," he said. "Contracts would not exist if people were not able to reach an agreement. That's my work."

Success, he said, lies in finding common ground.

One of the first steps in that direction is arriving at the understanding that no one person's view is an absolute representation of reality.

"What we are really talking about is our vision — the way that we see reality," he said. "My interpretation of reality is a construct that only exists in me and that

is a result of either what I learned or was taught from childhood on."

Each person's vision of reality is the result of a multitude of familial, cultural, religious, and economic factors, he explained. Any expectation that a conflict can be resolved by the domination of one view of reality over another is short-sighted and will only lead to future conflict.

"We need to be aware that our beliefs were taught to us and understand then that we may question them," Dieguez added. "Whatever you believe, it might be true today, but it may not be true tomorrow. Similarly, what you believe may

have been true yesterday, but is no longer true today."

A heightened recognition by world leaders of the effect change has on "truth" could be a critical component to finding solutions to conflicts that have cycled through many cultures for generations.

"People need to understand that nothing is absolute," Dieguez explained. "Reality is ever changing. I believe change is inevitable. That's life. Without change, there is no life."

People, of course, are uncomfortable with change, which more often than not is a source of anxiety and conflict, he noted. People most commonly prefer their

understanding of reality to remain fixed — but that can often prove to be a roadblock to resolving conflict.

"If you are not aware of the fact that your beliefs are not absolute and that they are subject to change, then you are making a big mistake," said Dieguez.

Dieguez brings a multicultural perspective to his approach to resolving points of dispute that might impede the attainment of an objective. Born in Mexico City, he was raised in a blend of Spanish and Mexican culture. His paternal grandparents came to Mexico after fleeing the regime of Francisco Franco in Spain. His mother's family, on the other hand, has deep roots in Mexico.

Dieguez's practice at Cacheaux Cavazos & Newton, an international law firm based in Mexico, is tailored to the needs of international clients investing in Mexico. He serves as a bridge that resolves any language or business culture barriers. He understands the different legal systems of both countries.

Based on his experience in negotiations of both complex and seemingly straightforward business concerns, Dieguez said effectively communicating your perception of reality is essential for there to be any hope of conflict resolution.

Poor communication creates more problems, which often leads to additional conflict.

In addition to clear and precise communication, Dieguez believes that in order to attain lasting solutions to complex problems leaders must work under a revised concept of "winning."

"When you go into a conflict, you need to have a crystal-clear definition of what win means," he said. "You have to be realistic. If you set unrealistic goals, then your win

is going to result in an imposition. But if you define a realistic win, then your win is going to result in change."

Imposing your truth on another is not winning, Dieguez emphasized.


"When you impose a win, it is a short-term win that will only result in a new conflict because there was no change," he said.

The idea of an absolute win for any one side is absurd, he declared. Finding common ground is the best step toward securing an enduring resolution.

As the world shrinks and as cultures increasingly collide, Dieguez said he finds hope for the future in the pendular nature of life.

"I don't feel our past defines our future. I feel our past defines our present and our present is a tool for defining our future," he said, explaining that he believes attaining balance should be our main objective. "Balance doesn't rely on doing your best to keep things static. Balance is achieved by your ability to pivot. Balance is movement. Balance is achieved through change."

For that to happen, Dieguez said education is fundamental. People need to learn to shift how we think about our individual truths as representation of changing reality and to redefine our understanding of "winning" in order to find long-term solutions to existential problems.

"You need to be ready to change even if it makes you feel uncomfortable," Dieguez concluded. "You need to be willing to let go of what you believe is a truth today. And you need to be ready to learn a different truth." 

Importance of civility heightened in wake of COVID pandemic

By Tom Kirvan



Scott McLean
General Counsel
Mann Lawyers LLP

At a time when the concept of civility has been shaken to its core, Canadian lawyer Scott McLean is of the firm belief that “there is no advantage or incentive to being uncivil in the face of incivility when one is prepared” to engage in proper discourse.

McLean, who serves as General Counsel and Director of Practice Development for Mann Lawyers LLP in the Canadian capital of Ottawa, offered as much in speaking notes provided to attendees at a May 2023 Ontario Legal Conference in Toronto. His message, while meant principally for an audience of lawyers, also has wider societal implications, particularly in the political realm.

“No reason to be drawn into a dust up,” said McLean. “Incivility is often a place for the unprepared to hide.”

With more than four decades of commercial and related litigation experience, McLean knows of what he speaks when it comes to the topics of civility and professional responsibility. After being admitted to the Ontario Bar in 1977, McLean has appeared at trial, judicial review, and appellate levels in federal and provincial courts across Canada, including serving as senior counsel to the Independent Investigation into the 2008 Listeriosis Outbreak that caused 23 deaths in Canada.

McLean, who holds degrees from Carleton University and Windsor Law School, joined Mann Lawyers in 2019 for the express purpose of establishing a mentoring program and training regimen for young lawyers.

Of utmost importance in his role, according to McLean, is the need to understand the difference between effectiveness and excellence.

“Effectiveness refers to the degree to which something is successful in producing a desired result,” said McLean. “Excellence refers to the quality of being outstanding or extremely good.”

“In ‘After Virtue,’ the philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre argues convincingly that effectiveness and excellence are two very different things,” McLean indicated. “People can be effective in many ways: the scientist that falsifies data to win a research grant, the police officer who plants evidence to secure a conviction, the Olympic athlete who ‘wins’ a medal through blood doping. Each may be effective in the sense of achieving their goals, and may reap rewards, but they are not excellent. Civility breeds excellence, a higher order of professionalism.”

Four years ago, the need to take civility to a higher level began when the coronavirus pandemic swept around the world, a continuing crisis that to date has claimed more than 7 million lives.

“I suggest that in our practices, and of course almost everywhere else, the disruptions wrought and the lessons learned from COVID-19 (recognizing the horrible losses occasioned) have added vigor to the need for civility,” McLean said. “No matter what law we practice, being uncivil, inefficient, and wasteful of time and resources is a luxury we can no longer afford (if we ever could). Patience and tolerance for new ways of getting things done are the order of the day. At every level of our professional lives, in everything we do whether as solicitors or barristers, how, where, and when we work will never be the same. The times have indeed changed, and we are deeply aware that many changes will not reverse any time soon, if at all.”

The pandemic, and its continuing effects, also has dramatically altered access to justice, a “tectonic change”



that was “expressed most recently in preparations for an online meeting of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development Global Roundtables on Access to Justice (OECD),” according to McLean.

At the meeting, the OECD noted that in addition to the pandemic causing large-scale loss of life and severe human suffering globally, it also has “generated a major economic, social, and political crisis, which touches every aspect of people’s lives.”

Those caught in the COVID-19 crossfire include “vulnerable and disadvantaged groups . . . especially those in precarious employment or financial conditions, those living in poor quality housing, the socially isolated, and those already struggling with low subjective well-being or mental health conditions,” OECD officials stated.

“Increased vulnerabilities are in turn likely to lead to a surge of legal needs, especially for SMEs [small and medium enterprises], entrepreneurs, middle income, and disadvantaged groups, which

may in turn increase the pressures on social and economic systems, thus adding to the vicious cycle,” the OECD said. “As such, any pathway for recovery must integrate accessible and people-centered justice systems as core pillar, as legal and justice services play a major role in restoring economies, social cohesion, and confidence in institutions.”

In reacting to the pandemic, the legal profession has instituted a number of profound changes in how “we communicate with colleagues and clients, other members of the bar, relevant institutions, and the court,” McLean indicated.

“We now work from home at a rate never contemplated by our profession or any other,” he said for openers.

Secondly, “we commonly ‘meet and work’ with one another through transmission media,” McLean said. “‘Virtuality’ is our newest refrain; we have virtual meetings, virtual execution of our work product, virtual attestations, virtual contracting, virtual closings, virtual attendances

on clients, virtual appearances, virtual professional development programs, virtual court appearances and judicial services.

“And, for a lengthy period and for some still, we were masked, yet another demarcation, another form of disintegration and reintegration of the means and media through which we interact, another form of social exclusion.

“We are beset with these and other new or newly vibrant ways of effecting or conveying something, with a new or certainly upgraded force and effect in achieving our goals, meeting our business and personal deadlines, and maintaining our contacts with and fulfilling our duties to our clients,” McLean added.

In some respects, COVID produced several positive societal outcomes, McLean said.

“To our unbridled amazement, these changes occurred over a remarkably short period of time and came to us without any personal or shared antecedent. We are in an important sense pioneers or

guinea pigs, who ‘can see the footprints in the virtual sand,’ with a nod to Rush in its song ‘Virtuality.’

“Accepting the tragedy inherent in the genesis of these changes in how we communicate with one another and how we now practice, the changes themselves are not necessarily a bad thing,” McLean added. “Many of them are now or likely to be recognized ultimately as perhaps a good thing. But, and it is an important but, with the changes to the way we practice comes a responsibility to work at all levels more efficiently, effectively and courteously than ever before. That this is so becomes more evident when we recognize that our thoughts of a post-COVID-19 transition continue to mutate into a reluctant acceptance of a chronic COVID-19 reality.”

Lawyers “play our part by accepting these changes in inter-personal dynamics for what they are,” McLean stated.

“We play our part by recognizing that the legal and justice services we provide, and the public interest we manifestly protect, demand ‘that matters entrusted to a lawyer be dealt with effectively and expeditiously, and fair and courteous dealing on the part of each lawyer engaged in a matter will contribute materially to this end.’”

In closing, said McLean, “we play our part, each and every one of us, by recognizing the fundamental changes in inter-personal dynamics that COVID-19 brings with it. They are not all necessarily new, but they are newly embraced.

“We play our part by acknowledging the link between the worldwide social crisis identified by the OECD, and the need for professionalism and consideration on the part of the legal profession.

“And we play our part by setting a tone that both supports and accommodates how best to move forward in these changing times,” he said. **P**



A 'storm' of unprecedented fury gathers on the horizon



Movie-goers undoubtedly will remember "The Perfect Storm," a 2000 drama starring George Clooney and Mark Wahlberg that tells the true-life story of a commercial fishing boat that was lost at sea during the rage of a nor'easter that collided with Hurricane Grace in the fall of 1991 off the coast of Nova Scotia.

It was a movie without a happy ending, as all six crew members of the Andrea Gail perished in the storm that reportedly produced waves as high as 100 feet.

The tragedy, in addition to spawning a book and a subsequent movie, also produced a term – "perfect storm" – that has become part of our vernacular to describe a convergence

of multiple events with invariably disastrous consequences.

The now oft-used term could well describe the outlook for 2024, a year that portends all sorts of ominous events occurring.

Such as a much wider Mideast conflict that erupts across the region, spreading far beyond the Israel-Gaza borders to include military combatants in a host of other countries.

Or a widening and intensification of the war in Ukraine, a Russian-provoked tragedy approaching its two-year anniversary in late February that has the catastrophic potential to trigger a nuclear conflict between two superpowers.

Or the continued rise of autocratic forces around the world, fed by assorted tyrants and demagogues seemingly bent on taking mankind to the edge of the abyss.

Or a further assault on the fundamental institutions that safeguard representative democracy, imperiling the future of free and fair elections while fueling conspiracy theories that sow distrust and contribute to political polarization.

Or an utter disregard for the concepts of civility, dignity, integrity, and honesty in political expression, trading those values and virtues for a system built on deceit, immorality, prejudice, revenge, greed, and hate.

The risks we face, of course, don't stop there, but instead extend into the uncharted waters of emerging technologies that can reshape society for good or evil in the years to come. Dare we know where advances in the field of artificial intelligence will lead – perhaps to a world filled with understanding, promise, and prosperity or to a society plagued by misinformation, disinformation, and ill-will.

Two years ago, when we unveiled plans to create the Primerus Foundation, we did so with a central purpose in mind – to promote the cause of "good government by good people" in countries throughout the world.

The effort stands in stark contrast to the list of failed autocratic regimes which are run on a dictatorial platform that employs aggression, repression, and corruption as the primary weapons in misguided quests for political dominance.

Closer to home, we set in motion plans to elevate the standards of the American political profession through a nonpartisan approach to problem-solving, working to build cooperation and consensus where confusion and chaos now reign in a Congress marked by stalemate.

Our effort is designed to channel collective energy and ingenuity to promote a new pathway to political progress. Its focus is to offer a nonpartisan approach to problem-solving, where fresh ideas from people of character and conviction can serve as the model for getting things done in a constructive fashion.

When we were formed in 1992, Primerus set out to become an "influencer," a positive voice for a legal profession



that sorely needed an opportunity to tell the story of its vital role in peacefully resolving conflicts in civilized society.


We did so by spreading the message of the Six Pillars, which have served as the backbone of our organization for the past 32 years, promoting the importance of such principles as integrity, quality, value, competency, civility, and service.

We now have utilized those concepts to frame the mission of the Primerus Foundation, which aims to unite people from different cultures, backgrounds, religions, races, and political persuasions toward the common good. Such a coalition has the potential to be a power broker for freedom and equality on a global scale, just causes that demand a stronger voice from the legal profession.

The work has been driven in recent years by a range of idealists within the Primerus community who have proposed the formation of a nonpartisan think tank. The tool will bring together some of the finest minds in the world for the purpose of proposing workable and innovative solutions to a host of critical issues facing society. Their task will be to offer an unbiased examination of each

problem and then to identify, prioritize, and select alternatives for a solution.

To achieve that goal, we welcome your ideas and participation in what could be the beginning of a transformational change in the way our governments operate.

The time has come when something bold must be done to end the vicious cycle of partisan bickering. Instead of scorching the earth between us, let's try an altogether different approach that features a willingness to find some common ground to make the world a better place for current and future generations. 

Best regards,

Jack Buchanan, President

Primerus firms take Global Day of Service program to a new level

By Tom Kirvan

Leave it to Winston Churchill to put the beauty of volunteerism into concise and profound terms.

“You make a living by what you get. You make a life by what you give,” said Churchill, the legendary statesman who served as Great Britain’s prime minister during World War II.

His message was put into action during the annual Primerus Global Day of Service in early December, a time when those in the international legal community helped at local food banks, homeless shelters, toy drives, children’s hospitals, reuse centers, and Habitat for Humanity projects.

The volunteer efforts literally spanned the world, ranging from cities across North America to communities in Europe, Australia, and Africa.

In South Carolina, for instance, the Columbia-based law firm of Collins &



Various members of the Demorest Law Firm helped pack food boxes during the holiday season.

Lacy, P.C. took a three-pronged approach to its Day of Service program, choosing to support an Adopt-A-Family campaign championed by the Families Helping Families agency, a homeless shelter operated by Oliver Gospel Mission, and by placing wreaths in front of cemetery markers as part of the “Wreaths Across America” program in honor of fallen veterans.

“Our firm values our relationship with Primerus and its mission,” said Collins & Lacy President Christian Stegmaier. “We are pleased to align some of our local community service with the Primerus global service initiative. Our team members enthusiastically supported the program and had a rewarding experience with our local charities.”

Members of the Demorest Law Firm, PLLC, in the Detroit suburb of Royal Oak, pitched in to help pack perishable goods for



840 needy households in support of the Forgotten Harvest program.

“Forgotten Harvest works every day to fight hunger and food insecurity by delivering 144,000 pounds of surplus food per day to local charities in Michigan, free of charge,” said a spokesperson for the Demorest Law Firm. “It was great to contribute to their robust program.”

In Cleveland, the Primerus firm of Schneider Smeltz Spieth Bell LLP began the Global Day of Service with a food drive for homeless veterans in conjunction with Frontline Services.

“We also participated in the Twinkle Shop of theirs in which toys and necessities are collected (through the firm’s employees) for displaced children and their guardians, having been re-homed due to unfortunate circumstances to one or both parents of the children,” said Firm Administrator Venera Ilievska.

“We gathered on December 20 at the Cleveland Browns’ Stadium and volunteered to take the adults one way and the children the other way to the Twinkle Shops and have them ‘shop’ for each other from all the toys/items having been donated,” Ilievska said. “It’s meaningful to meet all the individuals and children during this time.”

In Bogotá, Colombia, members of Pinilla, González & Prieto Abogados firm teamed with the Fundación Luz Pan y Vida, an organization “from the community for the community,” according to a spokesperson for the firm.

“We worked with the Foundation, which takes care of the children of the recyclers in the Olivos neighborhood and the municipality of Bosa while their parents work,” the spokesperson said. “In addition, they help them with their tasks, give them food, and train them in different playful



Various Primerus member firms helped prepare packages and boxes of food for distribution during the Global Day of Service activities.



Members of the Eddins Domine Law Group, PLLC in Louisville, Ky. joined hands to restock a local food pantry operated by St. Matthew’s Area Ministries in conjunction with the Boy Scouts Fall Food Drive.



A visit to a group home for children afflicted with albinism was a heartening and enriching experience for members of the Mhishi Nkomo Legal Practice.

activities, thus improving their quality of life.”

In Harare, the capital city of the Southern African nation of Zimbabwe, the firm of Mhishi Nkomo Legal Practice provided a lift for the Albino Charity Organization, a nonprofit dedicated to supporting children with albinism, a disorder affecting the eyes and skin.

“Our commitment to making a difference led us to close our offices for the day, allowing every member of our firm to actively participate in the event,” said Communications and IT Officer Darlington Zondo of the visit to the group home near Harare. “It was a powerful testament to our shared dedication to community service. During our visit, we had an



amazing time engaging with the children and sharing memorable interactions.

“To support the organization’s ongoing efforts, we donated much-needed sunscreen lotions, essential food supplies, and clothing items donated by families of members of our firm,” Zondo added. “We also actively participated in serving the food we prepared and socially interacted with the children. Witnessing the smiles on the children’s faces as we shared the meal was incredibly rewarding. By participating in . . . the Primerus Global Day of Service we aimed to make a positive impact and to be lawyers who are good people.”

Dream Weaver

Guinean attorney strives to build a firm that goes beyond borders

By Brian Cox

As the founder of a growing law firm in the capital of Guinea, Aboubacar Kante is living his dream – even as he continues building it.

“Being an attorney at law has always been my professional goal,” says Kante. “And I can say I’m lucky enough because there are few people who are able to identify a professional goal and are able to reach that goal.”

It is only the first goal Kante holds for himself and his young firm.

Kante started ASK AVOCATS in 2020 – in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, no less – and the firm has already been recognized among the top 20 on the African Law Firms Powerlist by AfricaBusiness+.

In just three years, the firm has expanded to include four attorneys-at-law and 13 jurists and of counsels. Kante remains the firm’s only partner, but he envisions the firm achieving inter-continental influence.

“In the African legal market, we are not used to large law firms with hundreds of lawyers,” explains Kante. “We are reluctant to partnering. My dream is that I want to build a law firm that can go beyond the boundaries of Guinea.”

That objective is behind Kante’s decision to hire attorneys not only from Guinea, but other African countries as well, such as Sierra Leone and the Ivory Coast. It also is why he recognizes the need for his lawyers to be able to “communicate and deliver all legal advice in English.” Kante himself speaks several languages, including English, French, Wolof, Maninka, Bambara, and Soussou.

In addition, the aspiration of becoming an international law firm is at the center of Kante’s decision to join Primerus.



Aboubacar Kante
Attorney
ASK AVOCATS



Dakar, Senegal

"I understood Primerus wanted to expand its network and has a specific interest in Africa," he says. "Primerus has a large network around the world. Being a member of Primerus, I'm convinced will help the firm to achieve our goal to go beyond the boundaries of Guinea."

Kante has a legal pedigree. His father, Fodé Kante, was a judge who last year retired after serving a 7-year term as a justice on the Common Court of Justice and Arbitration (CCJA). The supranational court ensures the uniform interpretation and application of legislation created by the Treaty on the Harmonization of Business Law in Africa.

Kante knew from an early age that he wanted to practice law and set himself on a course to achieve his dream.

Though he attended primary school in Guinea's capital of Conakry, where he grew up and now practices, Kante moved to Dakar, Senegal, for his high school years because it offered the opportunity to fulfill the prerequisites for attending law school.

During his four years in Dakar, Kante stayed with the family of one of his father's friends, who "adopted me like their son."

After earning his high school diploma in 2007, Kante attended the Cheikh Anta Diop University School of Law in Dakar. He was then accepted into a master's in business law program in Paris.

"My dad was very excited, my family was excited," says Kante. "I was excited, too, but at the same time I had a little anxiety

because I was doing well in Senegal and I didn't know how I would do in Paris."

But his anxiety was misplaced. Though young and unfamiliar with the city, Kante quickly adapted and found his feet. He completed his master's degree and was admitted to the Paris bar in 2012.

"My dad was so proud and excited," recalls Kante. "He called all his friends and family to tell them that I was a qualified attorney in Paris."

Kante accepted a position in the Energy and Natural Resources department at Jeantet, a full-service French law firm that also has offices in Casablanca, Geneva, Luxembourg, Budapest, Kyiv, and Moscow. His two years at the firm offered Kante his first taste of an international law practice

and seeded his dream of starting his own firm with a global focus.

In 2014, he was ready for the next step toward achieving the dream.

"I decided since I wanted to be a business lawyer, I knew that it was a requirement for me to work on my English," he says about his decision to pursue an opportunity to study law in the United States.

He was accepted into the LL.M program at Washington University in St. Louis where he earned additional master's degrees in American law and in negotiations and alternative dispute resolution.

Kante says his experiences studying abroad have deepened and broadened the scope of his practice and the help he received along the way has influenced his worldview.

"I'm getting the benefit from it every single day," he says. "I have learned that I can adapt and there is no perfect situation. There will always be some issue, but also no matter where we are in the world there are good people."

From the family who welcomed him into their home in Senegal to the roommates

he had in St. Louis who helped him learn about American culture, Kante remains appreciative of the care and assistance he received.

"Be in touch with the people around you," he advises. "Don't make things harder sitting in a room trying to calculate. Be in touch with people and you will see there are good people around you."

That philosophy informs the business culture at ASK AVOCATS where Kante stresses remaining positive regardless of how challenging it may get at times.

Kante completed his studies at Washington University in 2020 just as the COVID-19 pandemic shut down the world. Stranded in St. Louis, Kante spent his time attaining U.S. citizenship and forming a plan to start his law firm.

He launched the plan once the borders re-opened and he could return to Guinea.


He now travels often to Paris, London, the U.S., and around Africa to advise clients. Much of his practice centers on mining law and assisting companies with incorporation, licensing, contract negotiations, and shareholder agreements.

Kante and his wife, Aminata Traore, have been married six years and have a 5-year-old son named after Kante's father, Fodé. Aminata is an account manager for an internet provider company.

As he continues building his dream, Kante sees a future of growing business opportunity in Guinea and across Africa.

"Africa needs more business law firms," he says. "In the coming years, I believe we will have more competent specialists and business lawyers. I think this is one of the key elements for African development and for African people to get all the benefits from the investment that they're receiving."

He believes the next generation of upcoming lawyers will increasingly decide to have their main practices in Africa and that their presence will lead to a deeper trust from clients who are looking for attorneys to guide and secure their investments.

"While our firm has been successful very quickly, I don't think I've reached my goal because I want to build a firm that has offices in many cities in Africa," Kante says with fervor. "I'm working toward that." 



Washington University in St. Louis, Missouri

African Games

Quadrennial spectacle showcases the best athletes on the continent

By Brian Cox



Every four years, the 54 countries on the African continent come together in a unifying celebration of athletic competition.

At the opening ceremonies of the 13th African Games this March in Accra, Ghana, flags will fly, thousands of colorfully attired athletes will wave, and enthusiastic audiences will cheer during the traditional Parade of Delegates.

First held in 1965, the African Games are the continent's largest multi-sport event.

"It's a big event in the African continent and everyone is looking forward to it," says attorney Neneng Yannick, whose law firm is in Douala, Cameroon. "It is always the pride of a nation when their country is well represented at the games."

More than 5,000 elite athletes are expected to compete in 25 sports, including cycling, swimming, arm wrestling, boxing, fencing, judo, karate, taekwondo, basketball, cricket, field hockey, football, handball, beach volleyball, rugby, volleyball, badminton, squash, table tennis, tennis, chess, and weightlifting. For eight of the sports (athletics, badminton, cycling, swimming, table tennis, tennis, triathlon, and wrestling), the competitions also will serve as qualifiers for the Olympic Games in Paris in 2024.

Pickleball, Scrabble, and E-sports are among the demonstration sports that will be featured.

"When people talk about the African Games, I feel a sense of elation because this is where some of Africa's best talent gets to showcase their breathtaking skill and leave us in awe," says Karabo Mponang, an associate with Brown and Company Attorneys in Gaborone, Botswana.

An athlete herself, Mponang says football (or soccer) is her first love. Her father organized a football league for many years and before attending law school she helped resuscitate women's football in Botswana by setting up a league and commissioning games.

"When I was growing up I was always ecstatic to be on a pitch or a court," she says. "The pitch or court did not come with the anxiety of being in a class and wondering if the red ink on my books would be a good mark or a 'please see me after class' remark."

Mponang looks forward to watching the games — which are expected to draw an online audience of 5.5 billion — and to being "filled with pride and joy" when she sees the blue, black, and white flag of Botswana in the arenas.

Guinean attorney Aboubacar Kante plans to attend the quadrennial event for the first time.

"It is a great rendezvous for all African people," he says. "From north to south, we all watch the games."

The founder of the business law firm ASK AVOCATS in Guinea's capital city of Conakry, Kante has a professional interest in the games.

"To me this is a good opportunity because in the firm we are working on developing sports law," Kante says, pointing out that Guinea has applied to host the games but has not been selected because it still needs to meet certain requirements. "But we're working on it," he adds.

Formally known as the All-Africa Games or the Pan-African Games, the first continental athletic competition was held in 1965 in Brazzaville, Congo. This year's African Games were initially planned to take place in Ghana in August


2023, but economic pressures, delays in preparations, and disagreement over marketing rights among key stakeholders led to the games being rescheduled for March 8-23, 2024.

Ghana has high ambitions behind hosting the African Games as the country looks to use sport to achieve national and continental development goals as well as contribute to its transformational agenda and the African Union Agenda 2063: "Africa We Want." Proponents of the African Union Agenda hope that by the year 2063 that Africa will be "a continent of seamless borders," marked by "management of cross-border resources through dialogue."

The games will take place in three host cities: Kumasi, Cape Coast, and the capital city of Accra. Ghana estimates the games will generate \$1 billion in revenue and create 100,000 jobs.

"I think the African Games 2024 is going to be a great success as each African state will be represented, which gives the games a competitive urge among African Union member states to showcase their talents in the various sports disciplines," says Yannick.

The upcoming event, according to Mponang, also is likely to produce more than its share of lifetime memories.

"These athletes constantly remind us that not only can we dream it, but we can live it," says Mponang. "The African Games are not just games to us, they are a reminder to the African child that anything is possible, if you believe." 

Goal Oriented

Attorneys find a special joy in playing the coolest sport

Canada and Finland are two countries – while separated by nearly 4,000 miles – that share a long love affair.

With hockey.

The winter sport that has produced a galaxy of NHL stars also has cast a spell on players

of all other abilities, whether they be of the youth, rec league, or wannabe variety.

Among those who possess a special passion for the winter pastime are attorneys Tomi Merenheimo of Helsinki, Finland and Adam Kelso of Manitoba, Canada, two hockey-mad countries where

ice time holds a certain sort of value that is beyond conventional measure. Their shared joy in playing the sport transcends geographic borders and serves as a bond that helps bring out their best qualities as lawyers.

See what they're all about. [▶](#)

Popular sport plays fun role in life of Canadian attorney

By Tom Kirvan



Among historians, there is a divergence of opinion on the origins of hockey, a sport that continues to captivate millions of players and fans around the globe.

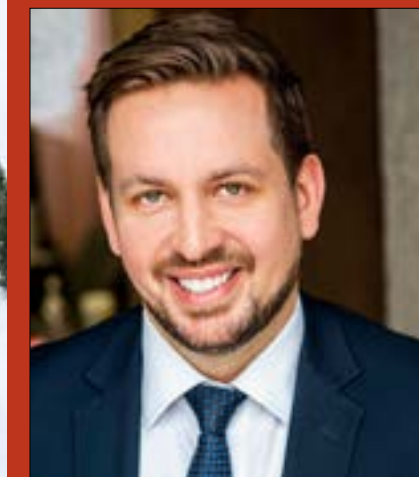
By most accounts, Canada is credited with modernizing and popularizing the sport as we know it today, although some believe that hockey's beginnings can be traced to a "stick-and-ball" game played on ice in the early 1600s in kilted Scotland of all places.

Wherever the first puck was dropped and whenever the first goal was scored, Winnipeg native Adam Kelso has held a firm grasp on the sport's cultural importance to his ancestral home in the Canadian province of Manitoba.

"To anyone growing up in Canada, hockey is the ultimate sport and offers lessons that can be valuable in almost any endeavor," said Kelso, a real estate attorney with PKF Lawyers in Manitoba.

Kelso, who graduated from Robson Hall Faculty of Law at the University of Manitoba in 2011, has played hockey since he was a kid, developing an early passion for it on a neighbor's back yard rink. Such homemade ice surfaces, of course, sprout up in neighborhoods across Canada during the winter months, ensuring that there is a steady stream of players always honing their hockey skills.

"I played community organized hockey until high school, but never at a particularly high level," said Kelso. "I was a little bit more into basketball during high school, but I kept playing recreational hockey and then was part of our law school team, going on a couple of road trips to Grand Forks, North Dakota. Their law school and med school put on tournaments there."



Adam Kelso
Attorney
PKF Lawyers

Attorney Adam Kelso is based in the Selkirk office of PKF Lawyers, a Winnipeg law firm that is marking its centennial anniversary in 2024.



Winnipeg, Manitoba

His hockey involvement continued to grow when as a first-year law student he was drafted to play in a lawyers' league comprised of squads from six law firms in Manitoba. The Winnipeg Law Hockey League offered the added benefit of a "networking opportunity" for current and aspiring lawyers, said Kelso.

"I'm still playing on the team with a lot of the same guys," said Kelso of his now 15-year tenure with the squad, which plays each Tuesday evening from September through March in one of three time slots – 6:45, 8, and 9:15 p.m. "It's been a great

way to break up the week and to get some regular exercise."

Kelso has played as a defenseman exclusively in the lawyers' league, although he has periodic opportunities to display his goal-scoring ability on the power play where passing and stick-handling skills are at a premium.

"It's a no-checking, no-slapshot league to cut down on the possibility of injuries," Kelso indicated. "There have been a couple of standout players in the league, including some who used to play in the

WHL, the highest level of junior hockey in Canada. I used to be one of the better players when I started, but as a number of younger players have come into the league, I'm more of the steady, stay-at-home defenseman," he said with a grin.

One of three siblings, Kelso is the younger son of Louise and Jim Kelso. His father is an IT specialist at the University of Manitoba Business School, while his mother is a retired elementary school teacher.


Kelso initially had plans to pursue a pre-med program at the University of Manitoba but decided to "pivot" to a degree in economics after getting his fill of a heavy diet of chemistry and biology courses.

Upon graduation from law school, Kelso landed a job with David L. Moore & Associates, practicing in the areas of real estate, wills and estates, and corporate and commercial law. The firm became part of PKF Lawyers in 2016. Headquartered in Winnipeg, PKF has upward of 30 attorneys spread across six offices in Manitoba.

Kelso and his wife Michelle, who is the communications and event coordinator for the Manitoba Veterinary Medical Association, were married in October 2022, a wedding attended by a number of his hockey friends.

While his hockey buddies eschew any weekly practice sessions because of the demands of their professional responsibilities, Kelso said they do hold occasional "team building events on weekends to discuss strategy and to enjoy a few drinks."

The formula has proven to be a winner in recent years, according to Kelso.

"As best I recall, we've won the league championship three of the last four years," he said proudly. 



Adam Kelso (back row, far left) and his teammates were all smiles after winning the league title in 2022.

Hockey gives Finnish attorney different outlook on work-life

By Tom Kirvan

Tomi Merenheimo began his legal career in 1998, and currently focuses his practice on contract law, mergers and acquisitions, employment issues, and technology.



Tomi Merenheimo
Attorney, Managing Partner
Magnusson

When Tomi Merenheimo became managing partner of Magnusson Ltd. in 2011, he began instituting a sweeping culture change designed to make the word “we” the heart of the firm’s operations.

The decision was a departure from how the Helsinki-based firm had traditionally gone about its business and was the

proverbial sea change from the way his previous firm was structured.

Merenheimo, who earned his LL.M. from Helsinki University in 1997, said the move away from a more conservative approach to management could be traced to his less than fulfilling experience as managing director of a top 10 Finnish law firm where a few partners held the reins of power.

“I wanted to institute a different kind of management philosophy where we could educate young passionate lawyers and develop them into skilled international professionals,” said Merenheimo, who formerly served as vice president of Legal Affairs and Investor Relations for a major Finnish technology company and licensed telecommunications operator.

“It’s like a hockey team in the sense that we’re not all the same, but we all are going in the same direction and playing the same game and helping each other in the rink,” Merenheimo said in employing a metaphor from a sport that has captivated him since he began playing hockey at the tender age of 6.

Hockey, of course, ranks as perhaps the most popular sport in Merenheimo’s native land, and continues to teach him much about how to manage the Finnish operations of a law firm that is part of a

larger legal conglomerate that stretches across the Nordic and Baltic regions.

“We’re not like a typical pyramid law firm where you have the managing partner as the top dog and everyone else is secondary,” Merenheimo explained. “Instead, what we have here is all the people taking responsibility for their own work while I’m giving my support for their development rather than them serving me.”

The philosophical change has taken years to fully implement, Merenheimo

acknowledged, noting the challenges posed in overcoming the traditional desire by attorneys to keep clients to oneself.

“We are not typical in regard to get a client and keep it to yourself,” said Merenheimo. “Instead, we are more like, ‘WE get a client, WE serve the client, and then WE determine who is the best suited to do the work’. It’s not necessarily the one who acquires the client.

“And when we hire people, we want to make sure they are willing to support the



Children playing ice hockey in North Harbor, Helsinki, near Magnusson’s Finland office.



Tomi Merenheimo earned a royal salute on Father’s Day, which was celebrated on November 12 in Finland. Pictured (l-r): Marcus, Vera, Thomas, Tomi, Marjo, Majja, Ville, and Fanny. Also pictured playing with a toy car was Robin, the son of Ville and Fanny.

efforts of others and that they have a passion for teamwork,” he added.

Merenheimo gained a special appreciation for the team approach during a time of tragedy when he lost his first wife to brain cancer, not long after the couple’s fourth child was born. At a time when he and his children were consumed by grief, Merenheimo found comfort in the support of others, eventually enabling him to forge a new life with his second wife Marjo, who has taught Finnish as a second language to immigrants of the Nordic country.

The couple has one child of their own, a 7-year-old boy, while Merenheimo has four children from his first marriage, ranging in age from 14 to 25. His oldest daughter, a nurse, blessed him with his first grandchild in 2023.

“I’ve had a teenager at home 25 years of my life,” Merenheimo said with chuckle, noting that during his time as a single parent he was limited to 3 hours of sleep a night, forcing him into a work-life schedule that was dramatically out of balance.

Merenheimo’s parents live in the Finnish Lapland, the largest and northernmost region of Finland that is the domain of reindeer, year-round light phenomena, and vast expanses of arctic nature.

It was there that Merenheimo began a lifelong love affair with hockey, a sport that he plays weekly from late September through April. Somewhat fittingly, he plays center and is adept at both ends of the ice, developing a reputation as a skilled playmaker with a certain unpredictability to his slapshot.

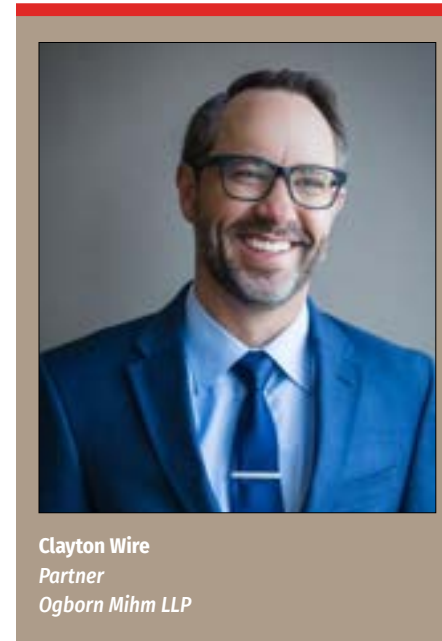
“One of my good friends is a goalie and he says that I’m the most dangerous knifer because even I don’t know where my shot is going after I shoot it,” Merenheimo said laughing.

Merenheimo celebrated his 50th birthday last year, an age milestone that has given him a different perspective on his place in the sport.

“I’m not the best player and never have been, but I know what I can do and what I cannot do,” he said. “I know when I can take some risks and when I should hold back, just like at work.”

Adversity, 24/7 farm life taught valuable lessons for a native Coloradoan

By Brian Cox



Clayton Wire
Partner
Ogborn Mihm LLP

Clayton “Clay” Wire is a Colorado trial lawyer who works with whistleblowers to expose illegal conduct.

Clayton Wire’s life path to a career in law is unlike most.

“I’m an only child. I was homeschooled. My parents were hippies, and I grew up with no electricity, running water, or telephone. I hope I’m not too weird, but you’d expect me to be a lot weirder,” Wire says with a laugh.

As a result of his uncommon childhood, Wire brings a distinctive brand of curiosity and independent thinking to his law practice.

The native Coloradoan attributes his problem-solving skills and unique perspective to growing up on his family’s subsistence farm and then as a teenager to finding himself largely living on his own, holding down a job while also attending high school.

“I didn’t have the benefit of the more socialized or regimented public-school system,” says Wire. “The education I got taught me to think outside the box quite

a bit and to be a self-starter and my own educator in a way.”

He was born in a one-room shack with no running water or electricity. A wood-burning stove served for cooking as well as heating. His parents, who met in San Francisco and gravitated toward the “hippie culture” of the time, purchased a 40-acre homestead in the northwestern mountains of Colorado with the aim of going off-grid. The property was approximately two hours north of Denver, past a small town called Red Feather Lakes, which is just south of the Wyoming border.

For the first year, Wire’s parents lived in a tent and a teepee while his father built a barn and the shack where Wire was born. Over several years, Wire’s father also built a one-room log cabin by hand that the family moved into when Wire was around 5 years old. In place of a refrigerator, his father dug a root cellar. His mother did a lot of spinning and weaving with mohair from the goats they raised and sold her wares at fiber arts festivals. They canned food and slaughtered goats and chickens in the summer to make it through the harsh winters. He recalls several times when the family was snowed-in for as long as two months.

“We were pretty much subsistence,” says Wire. “My childhood was essentially lots of goat shepherding.”

A donkey carried young Wire’s books when he went out to tend to the goats and Wire would do schoolwork while the goats grazed.

Wire says he learned early on the necessity for hard work. There was always a sick goat or one giving birth that needed tending. There were chickens to be fed and eggs to be gathered. Farm chores were a way of life.

“It was a 24-hour work cycle,” says Wire. “I was just there doing it with them. It didn’t really strike me as different until I was exposed to other stuff.”

No school bus could dependably reach the homestead, so the school district paid for Wire to enroll with Calvert School, a leading homeschooling curriculum publisher that has the distinction of once having President Barack Obama, Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O’Connor, Pulitzer Prize winning novelist Pearl S. Buck, and political commentator William F. Buckley Jr. as students.

The experience developed in Wire a strong sense of autonomy over his own education.

“I think it really spurred in me to be curious of things I didn’t know,” he says. “I was reading books they would never have let you read in public school.”

Wire started attending public school in the sixth grade after the family moved to Red Feather Lakes when he was 11. He says the social transition required him to become adept at connecting with people despite not having many cultural touchstones in common.

“I realized that I needed to be able to relate to people and to understand them on their level because I was not going to have any shared experiences with them.”

His parents separated when Wire was 16 and he ended up living on his own in a small studio apartment in Fort Collins, Colorado. Honed as a self-educator, Wire continued to excel in school, despite working a full-time job and not having parents around to tell him to go to class.

Often, fellow students with troubled home lives would crash on his couch. Many didn’t share Wire’s skills as a self-starter and lacked the motivation and resources to succeed in school.



A log cabin in the Colorado woods served as home for Clayton Wire while growing up.

“They didn’t have the experience of having to teach themselves,” says Wire. “They didn’t have the tools to be able to cope without the support of adults. I had that. I think that’s what separated me from those who didn’t have good outcomes.”

Wire discovered through the challenges of those years a heightened drive to succeed.

“I don’t know if I’d be where I’m at without that kind of adversity,” he reflects. “I think that by having to fend for myself and be much more independent than a lot of my peers, I was set on a trajectory where I really had to figure out how to navigate the world by myself. I think that has led me to being a much more independent thinker.”

Wire went on to study journalism and political science at Colorado State University in Fort Collins, graduating in 2005. His plans to attend law school were

interrupted when just before he was to take the LSAT he fell extremely sick and ended up in the hospital. He was diagnosed with Addison’s Disease, a rare illness that affects the adrenal glands.

“After I got sick, I very much felt that I had to find a purpose and a path forward,” says Wire, who had been an avid snowboarder for years. “I realized I had to focus on becoming an adult and a professional and being more conscious of who I was going to be and what I wanted to do with my life.”

Wire moved to Denver to attend the University of Denver Sturm College of Law, where he graduated in the top 10 percent of his class. He served as editor-in-chief of the globally recognized Denver Journal of International Law and Policy. All while tending bar at night.

The tangible skills he brought to law school were being able to relate to others, being empathetic and having righteous indignation at wrongs he saw being committed. He had no set constructs of what a lawyer did, but he sensed he wanted to do something involving constitutional or international law — before concluding those areas didn’t present a clear career path.

Wire met his wife, Rachael, while he was in law school after she returned from teaching English in Taiwan for a year. They now have two sons: Jackson, 9, and Cole, 6.

After graduating in 2009 and facing a bleak job market, Wire took a clerkship for Judge Nancy J. Lichtenstein of the Colorado Court of Appeals. If not for the clerkship, Wire believes he may have done personal injury work for a small law firm and that his career would have taken a completely

different direction. Instead, the position led to him joining Starrs Mihm, where he has remained throughout his career.

Wire is now a partner at the firm, renamed Ogborn Mihm after a merger in 2012. He primarily works with whistleblowers to expose illegal conduct, collect government rewards, and protect them from retaliation.

“My clients run the spectrum from C-level executives or general counsels at Fortune 500 companies to a woman who was terminated from a nonprofit because they wouldn’t let her bring her emotional support dog to the office,” says Wire, who has represented individuals in whistleblower retaliation and bounty cases, including in unique Qui Tam cases.

He also represents employees in discrimination and harassment cases, as well as contract disputes.

Wire credits supportive partners and co-workers for helping him develop an employment law practice that is primarily

focused on representing whistleblowers. He tells young associates that the firm provides an environment where they can “choose their own adventure.”

“If you feel passionately about something and you’re willing to put in the time and effort to make a practice area out of it, we’ll support you,” he says.


When Wire first became involved in whistleblower cases, it was a niche area in Colorado. Wire was among the few talking and writing about the practice field. One of his first cases was *Genberg v. Porter*, which concerned the anti-retaliation protections of the Sarbanes-Oxley Act, a 2002 federal law that established sweeping auditing and financial regulations for public companies. His success with the case helped to elevate his profile.

“We took the case because it was exactly what I wanted to do,” says Wire. “It allowed me to show a proof of concept: That we could attract large, interesting

whistleblower cases and be successful at them.”

Wire is involved with many national and local bar organizations, including the National Employment Lawyers Association, the Colorado Plaintiff’s Employment Lawyers Association, and The Anti-Fraud Coalition.

The attitude toward whistleblowers has changed dramatically over the past decade or more since Wire first ventured into the field.

“There has been a more societal and political recognition of whistleblowers as valuable,” he says. “The idea now is that not only do we want to protect whistleblowers from retaliation, but we also want to encourage them to come forward. They are valuable to our society. They are valuable to our economy. We want to incentivize them to come forward. They’re taking a risk to report to the government. It’s only fair they should share.” 




Clayton Wire and his wife, Rachael, have two boys, Jackson and Cole.

Survival Mode



They were teens when the dreaded “cancer” word crept into their lives, leading each of them on a harrowing journey that they somehow braved from diagnosis to wellness.

Now grateful to share the label as a “cancer survivor,” Ellie Wilcox and Haley Gort have another common bond – their belief in the mission of the Make-A-Wish program, where one now works while both treasure the memories of being wish recipients.

What follows – their respective stories – is meant to inform, to inspire, and to bear witness to the remarkable resiliency of two women united by faith, optimism, and determination. 

Wishful Thinking

A life-changing diagnosis turned into her life's work

By Tom Kirvan

A Make-A-Wish recipient as a teen, Ellie Wilcox has spent the past 13 years working for the organization that Morning Consult ranks as the "#1 Most Trusted Nonprofit" in the U.S.



Ellie Wilcox
Regional Managing Director
Make-A-Wish Michigan

Ellie Wilcox was accustomed to wearing a mask before "masks became a thing."

Long before.

Now 40 years old, Wilcox was just 17 when the mask became part of her daily attire as a high school student.

It also was a time when she became an early participant in a novel concept called "virtual school," an educational tool that decades later was the daily norm during the COVID-19 pandemic.

She was a senior at Kenowa Hills High School in Grand Rapids, Mich. at the time and suddenly was confronted with three words that would turn her teenage life upside down: acute lymphoblastic leukemia, otherwise known as ALL, a blood cancer that is typically fatal within months if left untreated.

Her diagnosis was made at Helen DeVos Children's Hospital in Grand Rapids after she underwent bloodwork to pinpoint the cause of severe fatigue, bloody noses, and random bruising. It was first thought that she might have mononucleosis, a viral infection that is common among teens and young adults.

But the hospital medical team led by Dr. James Fahner determined otherwise, informing Wilcox and her parents that she would need to undergo cancer treatment immediately.

The date was October 27, 2000, a day that will be etched in her memory forever.

"I still remember every minute of that diagnosis," Wilcox said. "I remember what I was wearing; I remember where I was; I remember the conversation my mom had when the pediatrician called."



In the fall of 2000, Ellie Wilcox was hospitalized with leukemia, beginning a three-year treatment regimen that would be telling in a variety of ways.

Almost immediately Wilcox would get what she termed as a "crash course in medical terminology," learning all about chemotherapy and its sometimes-punishing side effects, a regimen that she didn't fully appreciate as a 17-year-old girl wrapped up in all things associated with high school.

"I remember sitting in my hospital room when Dr. Fahner, who was the head of the pediatric oncology floor at that time, came in and I said, 'Look, whatever we've got to do, let's get going as I've got football kickoff tonight at 7,'" Wilcox said, recalling the teenage naivete she displayed.

The good doctor, of course, politely put the brakes on her evening plans, telling her that the beginning of a series of chemo treatments would take precedence over any football watching.

The initial three-week hospital stay would be the beginning of a three-year chemo regimen, marked by weekly sessions that were 4 to 5 hours in length and often left

her nauseated, fatigued, and depressed. And eventually without a full head of hair.

Unlike most cancer patients, Wilcox experienced significant weight gain due to the high-dosage steroid mix she was administered during the chemo sessions. Her life-saving treatments also kept her homebound for much of her senior year of high school, unable to participate in such events as the spring prom, annual awards banquet, and other important school activities.

"It was a tough time, emotionally and physically," she acknowledged.

But Wilcox was determined to persevere, deciding to "lean into the adversity" instead of wallowing in self-pity.

"Cancer happened to me, but it didn't define me," Wilcox said of her outlook on life. "I chose to see myself not as a cancer patient, but as a cancer survivor."

The upbeat attitude would serve her well at Grand Rapids Community College and then at Western Michigan University where she earned a bachelor's degree with an eye toward pursuing a career in teaching.

But before her college life began, there was a "Cure Party" to celebrate the end of her chemo treatments. Prior to that was an equally memorable event – a family trip to Hawaii made possible by Make-A-Wish Michigan, the state chapter of the national organization that grants wishes to critically ill children across the U.S.

That March 2002 trip to Maui, and all the joy surrounding it, fittingly enough would lead Wilcox down a different career path than the one she originally envisioned.

"I had an epiphany while I was doing my student teaching, deciding that I wanted to give back to the organizations that have meant so much to me on my cancer journey," said Wilcox, who has two brothers.

Following college, she began interning for several nonprofits and also started volunteering for Make-A-Wish Michigan. Her volunteer role then led to a job with Make-A-Wish in 2010, an opportunity that has grown into her current position as Regional Managing Director for the organization's office in Grand Rapids.

It is a big job, revolving around the ever-increasing need to raise funds for grant-wishing purposes. According to Wilcox, each wish on average costs approximately \$10,000 to fulfill, and each

state chapter is responsible for funding its own set of wishes. In the 2022-23 fiscal year, the Michigan chapter granted a record 475 wishes, one of which attracted national attention, Wilcox indicated.

A 17-year-old brain cancer patient named Jude asked for "Christmas in July," Wilcox related, seeing a need to help restock toys at Children's Hospital of Michigan.

"We fulfilled that wish and took it above and beyond, supplying more toys for every children's hospital (in Michigan) in his name, putting together little celebrations at each of them," she said. "His story was picked up by People Magazine and has been a very memorable wish this past year."



Doctor and patient, Dr. James Fahner and Ellie Wilcox, have shared a special bond since 2000.



Ellie Wilcox and her husband Travis with their two children, Quinn and Harper.

On the national level, Make-A-Wish was born in 1980 and its first recipient was a 7-year-old boy named Chris, a leukemia patient who wanted to be a "police officer." His wish was granted, only months before he would succumb to the disease.

"Chris was only 7 years, 269 days old when he died, but he taught me about being a man. Even though he was only a boy," said Tommy Austen, co-founder of Make-A-Wish.


In Michigan, Make-A-Wish is celebrating its 40th anniversary in 2024, a milestone that has special significance for Wilcox

and her husband Travis, the parents of two daughters, Quinn and Harper, ages 7 and 2, respectively.

On account of her cancer history, Wilcox wasn't expected to have much chance of giving birth, but faith and fate somehow intersected in a most miraculous way, she said. So much so, in fact, that the couple's two daughters share the same birthday (May 19), just five years apart.

The joy of experiencing motherhood is just one of the many reasons that Wilcox is inspired to serve as a mentor to critically ill teenage girls.

"I tell them that you have a choice," Wilcox said. "You can choose to be mad, sad, and bitter or at the end you can come out of this with a whole new perspective on life that not many people will be fortunate enough to possess.

"I really live in a way that if I can help one more person to see there is life after this and that you can do good things after this, then it's worth it. I want to help more kids and I want to be part of a positive direction in this effort." 

As a teen, Primerus assistant waged grim battle that tested her mental and physical resolve

By Tom Kirvan



Haley Gort
Administrative Assistant
International Society of Primerus Law Firms

There are certain numbers that speak volumes about Haley Gort and the journey she navigated before joining Primerus last spring as an administrative assistant.

Twenty-five spinal taps, 40 MRIs, 20 radiation treatments, three transnasal biopsies – all coupled with three months of intense chemotherapy to beat back the potentially fatal effect of a cancerous tumor that was inhibiting the function of the pituitary stalk in her brain.

And then there is one other number that perhaps is especially memorable for the 29-year-old Michigan native – a 10-minute meet and greet with Grammy Award-winning singer Carrie Underwood. But more about that later.

For now, Gort is more than content to let her mother, Jodi, tabulate the rest of the medical numbers that so painfully tell the tale of a then-sophomore student in high school who literally came face-to-face with cancer in late 2012 and somewhat miraculously emerged cancer-free three months later.

It's a modern medical story that Gort's mother has neatly and meticulously packaged in a giant binder that documents every doctor's appointment, scan, procedure, and treatment session over the course of the harrowing journey. It's a story that began when Gort began experiencing an "unquenchable thirst" and "vision issues" that made it difficult to decipher colors.

"I was drinking a ton of water, up to four gallons a day," said Gort of the early signs of the medical problems ahead. "And then, I was experiencing weird issues with my eyes, where I had trouble telling colors."

Her mother, who was "worried much more than me" at the time, immediately set up a doctor's appointment that quickly led to

an MRI that revealed a "thickening of my pituitary stalk," according to Gort.

"The stalk is supposed to look like angel hair pasta, while mine looked more like fettuccine," Gort explained. "It was way bigger than it was supposed to be."

Physicians at a hospital in Grand Rapids eventually believed that she might have a germinoma tumor that they began treating with in-home chemotherapy treatments over a four-month period. When the tumor failed to shrink and two transnasal biopsy attempts proved unsuccessful, Gort's parents decided to seek the help of cancer specialists at the University of Michigan Mott Children's Hospital in Ann Arbor.

There, Gort underwent a third transnasal biopsy that validated the gravity of the original cancer diagnosis, setting in motion an aggressive chemo treatment regimen designed to eliminate the tumor.

"They moved fast, ordering three months of chemo treatment right away for me," said Gort.

The all-day sessions proved incredibly taxing, she said.

"Chemotherapy is something that I wouldn't wish on my worst enemy," Gort admitted. "They were the worst things on the planet – at least for me."

Within a matter of weeks, Gort also began to experience a dramatic drop in weight and a noticeable loss of her shoulder-length hair.

"I was down to 86 pounds at one point, whereas my regular weight is in the 105- to 110-pound range," she related. "I also started losing some of my hair. I'd wake up in the morning and my pillow would be covered with hair. It got to a point where I just asked my mom to shave my head so that I didn't have to deal with it anymore."

Sporting a skull cap and a Make-A-Wish Michigan T-shirt, Haley Gort was all smiles for a 2013 photo op with country singing star Carrie Underwood. Also on hand for the special occasion were Haley's parents, Jodi and Quentin; her sister, Cami; and her brother, Dylan.



Going bald, however, had a decided upside, she said.

"I could shower in four minutes since I didn't have to wash my hair anymore," Gort said with a smile.

In the absence of any hair, Gort opted against the itchiness of a wig in favor of a variety of scarves and hats that friends and family members gave or made for her.

As an honor roll student, she also benefited from the understanding of her teachers, who gave her more time to submit assignments while she was undergoing the series of punishing cancer treatments.

"My teachers were absolutely amazing and couldn't have been better or more accommodating," Gort said with a special sense of thankfulness. "I had radiation Monday through Friday each week for one month straight, so I couldn't go to school. During that month, my basketball coach home-schooled me so I could keep up with my classwork."

Gort played basketball as a freshman, but her hopes of continuing to compete

on the court the following season were derailed by the seriousness of her health issues. Unfazed, she decided to do the next best thing, accepting a role as the team manager where she would help handle various practice and game duties throughout the season.

"It definitely picked up my spirits and kept me connected to all my friends on the team," Gort said of her new basketball role.

Eventually, it also gave her an unexpected opportunity to make a cameo appearance in the season's final game when her coach asked if she would like to suit up for action even though she was still weak from the radiation treatments she had undergone.

And much to her amazement, the student section at Caledonia High School was primed to respond, as was a local TV station that had its cameras rolling for one of the best feel-good stories of the season.

"Somebody had called the TV station to come out for the game (against Forest Hills Central) and the Student Council made special T-shirts for all the students to wear that had 'I Love Haley' on it with a

big heart in the middle," Gort recalled with delight. "The entire student section was wearing the T-shirts, so it was a white-out. It was very cool. I got a chance to play for about 30 seconds and then afterward I was interviewed by the TV reporter as were my parents."

Gort, who grew up in the village of Caledonia southeast of Grand Rapids, has three sisters and two brothers. Her parents, Jodi and Quentin, recently celebrated their 30th wedding anniversary, and have spent their careers in the food and restaurant industries. For all the love and support they displayed during her prolonged illness, Gort expressed her undying gratitude, a portion of which she gave them in musical form years earlier with an assist from two of her sisters, Cami and Caiti.

Acting separately and somewhat unknowingly, each sister sent a letter to Make-A-Wish Michigan when Gort was in the throes of her cancer battle, hoping that the nonprofit organization would find a way to fund a wish for her.

"My sisters didn't know that each other had written a letter to nominate me for



Haley (left) played in a memorial golf outing for her late uncle in 2021 with her sister, Caiti, and her best friend, Heather.

the Make-A-Wish program," said Gort, who was equally surprised when she was contacted by a Make-A-Wish official about the prospects of being a wish recipient.

"My top wish was to meet Carrie Underwood, who I've been a huge fan of since she won 'American Idol' (in 2005)," said Gort of the singing superstar.

Within a matter of a few months, her wish was granted in a big way, affording Gort, her parents, and younger brother the opportunity to enjoy a meet and greet with the country singer who has been lauded as one of the top female

for a series of photos with one of the most popular singers in the nation.

"She was so nice and friendly and later tweeted me that evening to tell me how much she enjoyed meeting me," Gort recalled, noting that she has met Underwood two more times at meet and greet sessions that singer holds for her legion of fans before concerts.

And yet, that first meeting was extra special, said Gort, especially when it came time to pose for a keepsake photo.

"I had finished radiation, but I was pretty much bald and was wearing a skull cap at the time," said Gort. "When it came time to pose for the photo, she asked if I was ready and I asked her, 'How's my hair look?'"

After being bombarded by a series of cancer treatments, Haley Gort displayed enough fortitude to make a brief appearance in a high school basketball game her senior season.



vocalists of her generation. They also were given tickets to her sold-out concert in Jacksonville, Fla. that evening in April 2013.

"We were picked up in a limo at the airport, had room service at the hotel, and were treated like royalty," Gort said of the once-in-a-lifetime experience made possible by Make-A-Wish Michigan. "It was crazy."

But in a very good way, as Gort and her family entourage (that also included her sister living in nearby South Carolina) enjoyed chatting with Underwood for 10 minutes before the concert, even posing

Beyond Bounds

Winter retreats tempt the tastes of all comers

By Tom Kirvan

In need of a winter retreat?

In the world of Primerus, the offerings come in the snow-covered and mountain-laden variety, depending on which region strikes your fancy during the first quarter of 2024.

For those who prefer to go off the beaten path, the choices are as plentiful as the number of possible permutations on a lottery ticket but with far better odds of coming home a winner.

To improve your odds even more, we've asked a select group of Primerus members to offer some of their favorite alpine alternatives for those in need of a snow fix, while also keeping in mind the desires of others who opt for a winter environment where assorted leisurely and sight-seeing opportunities await a curtain call.

Our winter panel includes Giuseppe Cattani of Milan, Italy; Bill VanCanagan of Missoula, Montana; and Andrew Griffin of Tokyo, Japan. [▶](#)

Array of National Parks adds to state's appeal for Montana attorney

By Tom Kirvan

The occasional urge to get away from it all is a feeling that attorney Bill VanCanagan knows well and one he is reluctant to fight, especially since he lives in the magical state of Montana where eight National Parks draw millions of visitors each year.

The headliners, of course, are Yellowstone and Glacier, two mammoth parks on opposite sides of the state that combined feature craggy peaks, glimmering glaciers, beautiful bodies of water, abundant wildlife, and eye-popping geothermal wonders that defy description.

A partner with the Missoula firm of Datsopoulos, MacDonald & Lind, P.C., VanCanagan regularly seeks joy and solitude in one of Montana's far-flung network of protected places, reveling in the natural magnificence of the seventh least populated state in the U.S.

VanCanagan, a Stanford University product, could have had his pick of law schools upon graduating from the Palo Alto, Calif. school in 1978 with a degree in economics. Instead, he opted to return to his roots in Missoula, a city nestled in the northern Rockies where five valleys converge at an elevation of 3,209 feet.

The city also is home to the University of Montana and its Blewett School of Law, an institution where VanCanagan earned his juris doctor in 1981 before venturing east to obtain an L.L.M. in federal taxation from Boston University in 1982.

Yet, each time VanCanagan spent educational time away from his native land, it only served to intensify the desire to return to "Big Sky Country," the unofficial name of the state that shares a 545-mile border with Canada.

"There has always been a pull to live here, mostly because of Montana's natural beauty, rugged wilderness,



William VanCanagan
Shareholder
Datsopoulos, MacDonald & Lind, P.C.

A Montana attorney for more than four decades, Bill VanCanagan planted his legal roots in the state after earning degrees from Stanford and Boston University.

and opportunities for adventure,” said VanCanagan, who also has fancied the region’s uncomplicated way of life. “It has a certain magic to it that most people who visit quickly recognize. Yellowstone and Glacier are two parks that are as incredible as they come, and I will always appreciate that they are readily accessible to me and my family.”

VanCanagan has spent more than 40 years with the Missoula firm founded in 1974 by Milton Datsopoulos and Ronald MacDonald. His practice focuses on commercial and business transactions,

real estate, land use, estate planning, taxation, and mergers and acquisitions.

The 15-attorney firm is recognized as one of Missoula’s largest and finest, and counts noted Montana industrialist and philanthropist Dennis Washington among its valued clients. Washington owns a number of construction, mining, and railroad companies in the U.S. and Canada. He also has been a generous donor to a variety of youth programs and to the University of Montana, where the football stadium bears his name, according to VanCanagan.

“We have been with him from the beginning of his business ventures and have truly valued the relationship,” VanCanagan said of Washington, who could be the subject of a Horatio Alger story.

VanCanagan and his wife, Lisa, have two children, Michael (27) and Michelle (24). Lisa, a CPA who earned a business and management degree from the University of Montana, has served as controller of the Missoula Catholic Schools and Foundation for the past 11 years.

Glacier National Park, Montana



“We share a love for the outdoors and for exploring,” VanCanagan said of his wife of 32 years.

Their winter passions include skiing at some of Montana’s most popular resorts, such as Big Sky, Whitefish Mountain, Bridger Bowl, Montana Snowbowl, Discovery, Blacktail, and Red Lodge Mountain.

Traversing the many slopes, said VanCanagan, has been an especially joyful family experience, particularly since many of the resorts are within easy driving distance of Missoula.

The region, he said, also is a winter hot spot for cross-country skiing and snowmobiling enthusiasts with a network


of trails in Yellowstone and other national and state parks.

“There is no shortage of winter activities to enjoy,” said VanCanagan, who owns a condo with his wife on the Flathead River in the northwestern part of Montana.

The state, of course, is crisscrossed with world famous trout streams that draws anglers from around the globe. The Flathead River ranks among the most special, flowing as it does from the Canadian Rockies into Flathead Lake, said VanCanagan, who said that “fishing on the Montana rivers and lakes with my dad” is a treasured childhood memory.

His father worked in sales for IBM and then 3M, while VanCanagan’s mother

was an administrative assistant at the University of Montana School of Education. They instilled in their son and daughter a love for “all things wilderness,” especially of the Montana variety.

“I’ve been fortunate to have traveled throughout the West, but I can say without hesitation that the most inspiring place I have visited is Flathead Lake for its natural beauty and majestic mountains and scenery,” VanCanagan stated. 

Tokyo attorney knows enough about winter to be dangerous

By Tom Kirvan

Andrew Griffin, who majored in Russian and Polish at the University of Tennessee, earned a master's degree in Slavic Languages at Ohio State University. He also reached Ph.D. candidate status at Ohio State, "which means a couple more years of study beyond the MA – and a gazillion more long Slavic novels to read," Griffin joked.



Andrew Griffin
Attorney
GL&T Law Office

Andrew Griffin, an attorney with the GL&T Law Office in Tokyo, readily admits that he is "not a great authority on skiing."

Yet, he has a history with the sport that is a combination of worldly, exceedingly adventurous, and decidedly comical.

Griffin, who graduated from Vanderbilt Law School in 1989, contributed a hilarious account of his first time on skis for the Winter 2023 edition of the Paradigm magazine. His ski adventure took place in Siberia, which ranks among the most foreboding of winter places on Earth, during a brief 1995 cross country ski outing on November 7, the old Soviet "Revolution Day" holiday that has somehow survived the splintering of the U.S.S.R.

He was on a 28-day legal assignment in Siberia while working on a joint venture project for Occidental Petroleum.

"When Americans came to do their 28-day rotation in Russia, they were expected to work all 28 days, 12 hours a day," Griffin explained. "However, the Russians did allow us a brief Revolution Day excursion for a few hours to a ski lodge – we had to go back to work afterwards. There would be cross-country skiing – this being Siberia, there was already a healthy layer of snow on the ground – and a lunch party with the obligatory vodka and pickled herring."

The prospect of stepping into a pair of cross-country skis was more than a bit daunting, Griffin admitted, especially since he had spent most of his life in warm climates where skiing opportunities were limited.

"I had never been skiing before and my attempts in childhood with roller or ice skating always ended up in pratfalls, so I was not very limber on snow equipment,"

While riding the Shinkansen, the high-speed rail network in Japan, Andrew Griffin regularly enjoys a dramatic view of Mt. Fuji, the nation's tallest mountain. The snow-capped peak is less than an hour's train ride from the capital city of Tokyo.



said Griffin, who traces his roots to Alabama, where his father graduated from the ROTC program at the flagship university in the southern state. "However, with a dose of 'Siberian courage,' I was able to get up on my feet and track over to the demarcated course and take my first spin."

Initially his first foray into the sport of skiing went well, until he took a tumble "in such a way that my right ski was virtually pointing backwards with my right foot still attached."

Ouch.

Which would be the most printable four-letter word that Griffin could use

to describe the pain that he would soon experience when the numbness of the Siberian cold would wear off a few hours later when he returned to work.

"It was while standing at the fax machine that the effects of the afternoon's series of toasts wore off and I felt the pain from the damage incurred by the rotation of my ankle in the ski," said Griffin, wincing at the thought. "It was so intense that I fainted dead away and keeled over at the feet of the startled fax lady."

All this would seem to indicate that Griffin has an aversion to winter and all things snow, but that is hardly the case.

In fact, he marvels at the winter beauty that unfolds before his eyes as he roars by Mt. Fuji on one of Japan's famous "bullet" trains that reach speeds approaching 200 mph. The highest and most sacred peak in Japan at 12,388 feet, Mt. Fuji is 100 kilometers south of Tokyo and stands as perhaps the most photographed mountain in the Far East because of its graceful conical shape.

"Fuji-san," as it is commonly known among Japanese, is a popular hiking site during warm weather months and can be readily climbed over the course of a day, offering magnificent views from the summit of what became Japan's first ski slope in 1911 when a pair of Austrian soldiers

reportedly skied down to the base of the active volcano.

On clear days, Griffin gets a glorious view of Mt. Fuji each time he takes the high-speed train from Tokyo to a weekly teaching gig as an adjunct professor at Ritsumeikan University, part of the Asia Pacific University program. It's a more than 7-hour trip by rail to the campus in Beppu, located on the southern Japanese island of Kyushu.


As you would expect of a man of his professional stature, Griffin uses his time wisely while in transit, working on a host of legal matters for GI&T, while also polishing his Japanese language skills. Griffin, who said he "reads Japanese

better than I speak it," is fluent in Spanish, Russian, and Polish. His proficiency with languages did not come naturally, he said, but instead is the result of effort and interest.

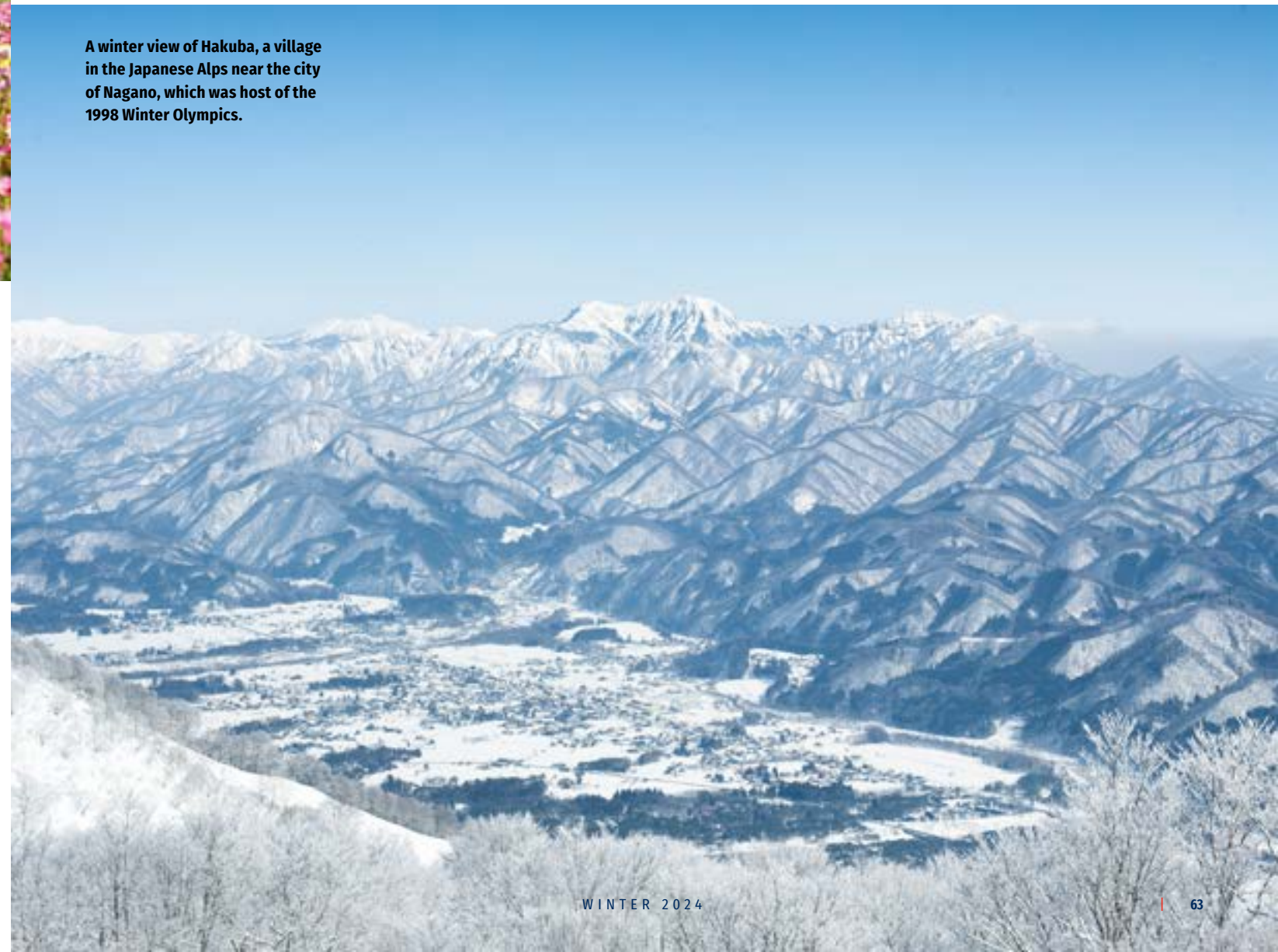
Since moving to Japan in 2006, Griffin has traveled extensively across its four main islands of Hokkaido, Honshu, Shikoku, and Kyushu. He also has visited the sites of two Winter Olympiads – in Sapporo on the northern-most island of Hokkaido and Nagano on the most populous island of Honshu. In 1972, Sapporo became the first city outside of Europe and North America to host the Winter Olympics, while Nagano – which is in the Japanese Alps – played host to the 1998 Winter Games.

Both sites, Griffin noted, attract ski enthusiasts from around the world, principally because of their Olympic cache, natural beauty, snow conditions, and resort amenities.

And for travelers who want to experience the simpler side of winter, Griffin said there is an increasingly popular option – snow-watching.

"All it involves is dressing warmly, spreading a blanket, and watching the snow fall with a drink of warm sake in hand," he said with a smile, adding that there are no lift lines either. 

A winter view of Hakuba, a village in the Japanese Alps near the city of Nagano, which was host of the 1998 Winter Olympics.



A taste of Italy whets appetite for winter fun

By Tom Kirvan



Giuseppe Cattani
Partner
FDL Studio legale e tributario

A native of Milan, Giuseppe Cattani is marking his 30th year as an attorney in 2024, while his firm will celebrate its 50th anniversary this year. Giuseppe, who has an older brother, is one of six partners with the business law firm that numbers 20 attorneys.

Giuseppe Cattani, the managing partner of FDL Studio legale e tributario in the culturally rich city of Milan in northern Italy, is a native son of the region that is renowned as the global capital of fashion and design.

Home to the national stock exchange, Milan also is a bastion of priceless works of art, such as Leonardo da Vinci's mural "The Last Supper," which is housed in the Santa Maria delle Grazie convent.

In the winter months, Milan can teem with tourists bound for some of Europe's most popular ski destinations in the nearby Italian and French Alps where Giuseppe and his wife, Marcella, have a vacation home at Mont-Blanc, part of a mountain range where the peaks range from 13,000 to 15,700 feet.

At age 56, Giuseppe has been a life-long skier and winter sports enthusiast, enjoying the rush of carving a path down a powder-laden slope as well as the solitude of snowshoeing through the woods where only the sound of deer, elk, and other high-elevation animals can be heard.

"Milan is conveniently located and is just a short drive to some of the finest ski resorts in the Alps; to the lake region of Lake Como, Lake Maggiore, and Lake of Garda; and to Portofino (on the Italian Riviera)," said Giuseppe. "Being so close to such areas makes Milan very special."

Milan's profile will take on added luster in February 2026 when it hosts the Winter Olympics with Cortina, a city located in the Italian Alps. The opening ceremonies of the Olympic Games will be staged in Milan

along with the hockey and skating events, while the skiing, luge, bobsled, and curling competitions will take place in Cortina. The alpine city also hosted the Winter Games in 1956, while the Italian city of Torino was the host of the 2006 event.

"Cortina, of course, is one of the main ski attractions in Italy, while Courmayeur and Chamonix in France are also nearby and very popular," said Giuseppe. "There are many great places to ski within a short drive from Milan."

Giuseppe – who is fluent in Italian, French, and English – earned his degree in international comparative law from Catholic University of Leuven in Belgium. In 1993, he received his law degree from Università degli Studi in Milan, beginning his career in business and commercial law a year later.

The headquarters of the Milan law firm of FDL Studio legale e tributario is housed in the Palazzo Borromeo, a beautifully restored structure that dates to medieval times.



Winter Alps with the Dolomites in the background, near Cortina d'Ampezzo, Veneto, Italy.



Before attending law school, Giuseppe spent a year of mandatory military or public service helping the homeless in Milan through a church institution, making and distributing meals in addition to assisting with clothing and health needs. It proved to be a profound experience, inspiring him to continue to volunteer on behalf of the homeless for years to come.


"I wanted to help make a difference in their lives, which was more in line with my sensibilities than serving in the military," Giuseppe related.

Giuseppe and his wife, Marcella, have been married for 26 years and have two sons, Michele and Tommaso, ages 23 and 20, neither of whom has decided to follow their father in the legal profession, taking note of the "long hours" and the "stress" that can come with the job.

Since 1974, FDL Studio legale e tributario has been providing high quality legal services to a wide range of national and international companies, including small, mid-size, and large multi-national groups. The firm has been based for more than 20 years in the magnificent Palazzo Borromeo, a historically restored medieval residence

in the heart of Milan. FDL is scheduled to host the 2024 Primerus EMEA Regional Meeting in Milan June 13-14.

While acknowledging the demands of his work responsibilities, which include representing a host of international clients in transactional and dispute resolution matters, Giuseppe knows where he can find a special form of refuge.

"On a ski slope or hiking through the woods," he said, noting that they bring "joy" and "peace" to his busy world. 

Given a chance, NYC attorney makes most of opportunity to develop global presence

By Tom Kirvan



Andrew Bochner
Managing Partner
Bochner PLLC

Andrew Bochner is undaunted by rejection.

In fact, the New York attorney has used it as motivation since graduating from Brooklyn Law School in 2012 when the global economy was still in tatters from the collapse of the subprime mortgage market. The resulting credit crunch squeezed the legal profession everywhere, causing job seekers like Bochner to experience a healthy dose of anxiety.

“It was not a great time to be job hunting,” said Bochner, the oldest of four boys who grew up in Rockland County, N.Y. on the west side of the Hudson River. “I had a huge stack of rejection letters from law firms all over, probably more than 400 in all. I saved them all. They have served as motivation to never give up and to know that it takes just one opportunity to change your life for the better.”

His path to legal success began at Weiss & Arons, a patent firm in the New York City suburbs where Bochner served as an intern during his last semester of law school. It was there that he got his first taste of the intellectual property field, a sector that initially intrigued him while he was a pre-med student at Yeshiva University in the northern tip of Manhattan.

“I was majoring in biology in college and was getting prepared to take the MCAT (Medical College Admission Test) when I found out about IP law and switched to studying for the LSAT instead,” said Bochner, who is the first member of his family to earn a graduate degree after earning a full ride scholarship to Brooklyn Law. “There was something about IP that really fascinated me.”

His growing interest eventually led to associate positions with two other New York law firms before he was appointed intellectual property counsel



The sights and sounds of Las Vegas, the host of the 2024 Super Bowl on February 11, was the site of a 2022 retreat for members of Bochner LLP.

at Click Therapeutics, a medical software developer in New York specializing in the emerging field of digital treatment apps.

“Because of my background in biology, as well as technology and software, the opportunity at Click was a perfect fit for me,” Bochner said in a profile piece appearing in the fall 2019 edition of the Brooklyn Law alumni magazine. “Law students should remember that their career is built on more than one job. It’s built on having experiences and having a network of people to call on in the future.”

Those varied experiences led Bochner to open his own firm – Bochner LLP – in 2019, devoting all his energy to it two years later during the tail end of the pandemic as its client base began growing significantly. Now, in the beginning of its fifth year, the firm has grown to nearly 40 attorneys and 55 staff members with offices in New York and two other states.

Initially focused on IP law, the firm has expanded its reach to the commercial litigation, health care, corporate, real

estate, and employment sectors, according to Bochner, noting that the growth has been client or opportunity driven.

“As clients have continually seen us as a valuable business resource, we have expanded our practice areas and legal knowledge by intensively focusing on the business goals of every business owner and company we speak with,” said Bochner.

His vision from the start has been to strike a balance between “culture” and “growth,” and developing a reputation for excellence that is known worldwide.

“As I have spoken to many people since starting the firm, I have come to realize the importance of combining a fulfilling and rigorous approach to developing client-centric legal skills with a culture that allows people to enjoy being a lawyer and truly feel that they belong,” Bochner said. “This intentional approach to culture is allowing us to build a firm of diverse lawyers who consistently collaborate in order to best serve our clients.

“One key element of our culture is building a strong team and enjoying working together, including having fun together,” he noted.

The firm’s first team retreat was in Las Vegas in 2022 followed by a November 2023 retreat in Miami.

“These retreats were an opportunity for the team to enhance their relationships while enjoying fun experiences,” Bochner indicated. “It’s also one of many ways we let our people know how much we value them personally and professionally.”

With those goals in mind, Bochner sets an impressive example for firm members, regularly conducting “de-briefs” with associates and partners to further enhance the client experience. He also travels the world while working with clients across the U.S., the United Kingdom, Europe, Central America, and the Far East, strategically balancing his work on the road with his desire to spend as much time as possible with his wife Lauren and their five children.

“I was just in Japan, while I was in Singapore last spring and in Korea during 2022, which required a quarantine waiver because of COVID,” said Bochner, who credits his wife for anchoring the family during his absence from home.

“She doesn’t love that I travel so much, but she understands the importance of it and supports it as the firm grows,” Bochner said of his wife, who formerly served as executive director of a nonprofit organization in the New York area.


As the firm’s managing partner, Bochner also is its principal rainmaker, a role that led him to seek out Primerus as he

continues to extend his global reach. He initially met with a Primerus member in the UK to gather some firsthand information about the international society of law firms, a meeting that confirmed his interest in becoming a member in the fall of 2023.

“We already have our own home-grown network, but I wanted to take it to another level,” Bochner said of his reasons for joining Primerus. “We very much have a long-term view of working with other firms and for building relationships that will benefit everyone. Our firm is also committed to building a culture where building relationships (internally and

externally) is seen as the truest path to consistent growth and enhanced client experiences.”

The firm already is aligned with the sixth pillar of Primerus, which stresses the importance of community service (see related story). That devotion to good causes and pro bono work is part of the New York firm’s DNA, said Bochner.

“Our culture is all about doing good in the community, and to best serve where service is needed,” said Bochner. 



Attorney Andrew Bochner and his wife Lauren have five children. They make their home in Westchester County, N.Y.

Law firm's commitment spurs its support of Lawfare Project

By Tom Kirvan

Growth is good in the law, and not just for bottom line purposes, New York IP attorney Andrew Bochner has discovered. And the law firm of Bochner PLLC also knows what it means to be committed to doing good in the community.

One added benefit of increased profitability is fueling the firm's pro bono efforts, which in recent years has doubled in size to nearly 40 attorneys that practice in a host of IP, litigation, and business sectors.

The firm's success, according to Bochner, has allowed him to direct some of its resources to helping The Lawfare Project with efforts to combat the rise of antisemitism and to "defend the civil and human rights of the Jewish community across a range of cross-cutting areas."

A New York-based nonprofit organization, The Lawfare Project enlists the support of a global network of attorneys to fight "discrimination wherever we see it," according to its mission statement. That determination has taken on greater urgency since the war between Israel and Hamas broke out in early October, a Mideast military conflict that has rippled throughout the world in the form of heightened tensions between Israeli and Palestinian supporters.

Bochner, who spent 18 months studying in Israel after graduating from Yeshiva University in 2008, said his firm's involvement with Lawfare began approximately a year ago after he became increasingly alarmed about anti-Jewish sentiment, particularly on college campuses across the U.S.

"Three of my four grandparents are Holocaust survivors, so this is most definitely a personal issue for me and my family," said Bochner of his commitment to root out antisemitism in society. "There

was no committee (at the firm) about this effort. It was me saying we're going to do this and we're going to treat this with a sense of seriousness."

As such, attorneys throughout the firm have been encouraged to take on pro bono cases aligned with the needs of The Lawfare Project, which in recent months have focused on protecting the freedom of Jewish students on college campuses.

In a recent letter to supporters of Lawfare, Executive Director Brooke Goldstein wrote that "responses from campus officials have generally been tepid at best, leaving Jewish students feeling unsupported and under threat" as military and civilian casualties in the war continue to mount.


"The Lawfare Project's lawyers are currently assisting numerous Jewish student activists in the United States and Canada who are experiencing hostile environments on campus," Goldstein wrote. "We are helping them navigate the situations and ensuring their civil rights are being protected.

"Moreover, we have mobilized our network of over 600 lawyers and dozens of law firms to provide pro bono legal services,

and we are preparing to file lawsuits against schools across the country," Goldstein added.

Bochner's firm is among those that are assisting with the legal effort, demanding a range of actions against antisemitic student groups "including that their recognition as student organizations be revoked and they be deemed ineligible to receive institutional funding, that these groups and their members be disciplined according to applicable school policies, and that robust bias training specifically aimed at protecting Jewish identity be implemented."

As the father of five children, ranging in age from 1-1/2 to 13 years old, Bochner said the legal cause championed by The Lawfare Project will be dear to his heart for years to come.

"The issue hits close to me as the parent of little children and the desire to keep them safe," said Bochner. "We have buy-in from people throughout the firm who want to help out and to make a difference in stopping the spread of hate," Bochner said. 



Hidden Gems

Treasured artwork adds to allure of Netherlands

By Brian Cox



Reinier W.L. Russell
Managing Partner
Russell Advocaten B.V.

An artistic masterpiece, the “View of the Golden Bend in the Herengracht” has a special historical appeal in the Netherlands.

From the intrepidity of 17th-century explorers to the pride of merchants in their prosperity, attorney Reinier Russell believes the spirit of the Dutch Golden Age is still evident in the Netherlands of today.

He even sees that spirit reflected in the values of his law firm, Russell Advocaten B.V. in Amsterdam.

“We have been solving problems for business owners for 80 years now,” he says of the firm his father, W.M.J. Russell, founded in 1943.

Reinier Russell and his older brother, Paul, along with Jan Dop are the current partners at the firm, which focuses on the corporate sector but also is internationally recognized as among the experts in the field of art and law. International art dealers, collectors, and museums from around the world seek the support of Russell Advocaten in disputes relating to authenticity of works of art, such as paintings, drawings, etchings, and sculptures of both old and modern art.

It is, in fact, through the artwork of 17th-century painters and printers that Reinier most dramatically finds representations of the spirit of the Dutch Golden Age that has endured over the centuries in the Netherlands.

The artwork to be discovered in the many museums of the Netherlands are what Reinier calls the country’s “hidden gems.”

A painting by Gerrit Berckheyde titled the “View of the Golden Bend in the Herengracht” hangs in the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam. The oil painting from 1671-1672 shows houses along the newly constructed Herengracht Canal, which became the section of the capital city where the wealthiest merchants and most influential members of Dutch society lived.



Dutch artist Albert Eckhout painted the "Study of Two Brazilian Tortoises."

"The mere fact that a painting exists of these houses from this time is an indication of the pride the Dutch took in their prosperity," says Russell. "Even today, the Herengracht is a prestigious address and when you are visiting Amsterdam, it is worthwhile to take a stroll and explore this area of the canal."

Exploration and extensive trade were foundational to the Netherlands' rise as a far-flung maritime empire in the 17th century, and Russell says the country remains a vibrant hub of global trade. As the managing partner of Russell Advocaten, he represents the interests of large Dutch companies and foreign companies based or active in the Netherlands.

The Dutch East India Co., formed in 1602, is actually the first company to offer equity shares of its business to the public, effectively conducting the world's first initial public offering. The Amsterdam Stock Exchange is considered the oldest,

still-functioning stock exchange in the world.

"Sailors went to the east and later to the west to see what was around the world and that is where we became the biggest investors all around the world," says Russell. "Anywhere in the world you find Dutch investors."

In a 1640 painting by Albert Eckhout titled "Study of Two Brazilian Tortoises", Russell sees an example of Dutch exploration expanding Europeans' understanding of the broader world.

Johan Maurits, governor of the Dutch colony in Brazil, took Eckhout and several other artists with him to South America to record the people, the flora and fauna, and the landscape. Eckhout painted the two tortoises in great detail. The painting now hangs in the Mauritshuis, which is located in The Hague and is a small world-class museum with an impressive collection of Dutch and Flemish paintings from the 17th century.

Centuries later, the Netherlands and Brazil remain strongly connected through trade. Russell is the honorary counsel for Brazil, a role he took over from his father who served in the post for 25 years.

Exploration also produced a boon in Dutch cartography during the 17th century.

Brothers Johannes and Cornelis Blaeu were Dutch cartographers with a studio in Amsterdam where they created superbly detailed maps, including the famous "Atlas Maior." Russell highlights the brothers' "Historic Map of Sergipe, Brazil," drawn in 1662, on which they depict native animals they had never seen themselves. The Blaeus drew the animals from descriptions provided by returning sailors.

Another example of the brothers' astounding talents is a 1655 map of Beijing, China, on which the cartographers painted people dressed in traditional Chinese attire.

"The Blaeu brothers created these maps for wealthy Amsterdam merchants who were more than happy to display their prosperity and knowledge of the world to visitors," explains Russell. "It shows the knowledge the Dutch had about foreign cultures at the time."

Russell compares the Blaeu brothers' ability to use knowledge and the use of their wide contacts with sailors and other travelers to produce accurate maps of regions of the earth where they had never gone to the practice of law.

"You have to know people and you have to have the knowledge," he says. "Knowledge alone is not enough. Knowing people is not enough if you don't have the knowledge. So, you have to combine both."

Artwork celebrating Dutch history and bearing testimony to the Dutch desire to discover and understand the world can be found in museums and universities

across Amsterdam. The Rijksmuseum "is a treasure," according to Russell.

"You can spend one, two, three days there and still not see everything," he says.

Other museums include the Van Gogh Museum, which houses more than 1,400 pieces of Vincent van Gogh's work, and the Stedelijk Museum, which features more than 90,000 pieces of modern art.

Today, the Netherlands exhibits its contemporary international presence through the air and on the sea. Schiphol Airport is one of the best-connected airports in the world, serving 350 destinations across the globe, and the Port of Rotterdam remains the largest seaport in Europe and among the biggest in the world.

"We're well connected," says Russell. "The environment here is safe, straight-forward, and good for doing business."

Russell says his firm's membership in Primerus since 2010 is another example of his firm's commitment to international business.

"The merchant spirit from the Dutch Golden Age is still alive in the Netherlands," says Russell, who has sat on the Primerus Board of Directors and has chaired the International Outside Corporate Counsel Practice Group. "We even have a special website for companies that want to become active in the Netherlands." (The site is startingabusinessnl.com.)

Even as art plays an important role in illustrating the Netherlands' history — especially the lasting influence of the Dutch Golden Age — artwork also is key to creating the culture of the offices of Russell Advocaten where framed art decorates most walls.

"It makes life a little bit nicer," says Russell. 



The "Historic Map of Sergipe, Brazil" was drawn in 1662.

Blue Bloods

Four Primerus attorneys once walked the venerable police beat

While their days as cops were decades ago, four members of the Primerus legal community remain part of a police brotherhood that is life-lasting.

The four – Terry Knister, Ed Murphy, Ray Lyons, and John Dahlberg – have ties that bind, sharing a wealth of experiences that helped shape their eventual careers as successful trial attorneys.

But before they began sharpening their legal skills, the four individually discovered the ups and downs of police work, navigating the daily challenges of a law enforcement profession that can be as dangerous as it is rewarding.

Here are their stories. 

A decade as a policeman set the stage for his life's work

By Tom Kirvan

There are certain dates in life – beyond the traditional collection of birthdays and anniversaries – that prove memorable, the kind that can serve as turning points and become part of an individual's permanent mental calendar.

For Chicago attorney Ed Murphy, one such date was September 14, 1970, a day more than a half-century ago when the Windy City native officially became part of the city's police force.

"I'll never forget that date," said Murphy. "It was the date of my appointment to the CPD (Chicago Police Department) and the day that I was assigned my star number. It was a red-letter day for me and my family."

In the long run, it also doubled as a day that eventually would lead Murphy down a different career path, one where he could combine his engineering background with a special skill for litigating as one of Chicago's finest defense lawyers in the product liability and insurance coverage fields.

"I was very fortunate that one career opened the door to another," said Murphy, one of the founding partners of Lipe Lyons Murphy Nahrstadt & Pontikis Ltd. "That was not part of my plan. It just happened that way, like many of the twists and turns in life."

The oldest of seven children, Murphy grew up on Chicago's South Side, part of an Irish-Catholic family that took root in the neighborhood following World War II.

"My dad had been out of the Army for a year when my parents began raising their family, just like so many others were doing after coming back from service during the war," said Murphy, whose father was one of 10 children while his mother was one of eight. "I eventually became the first in our family to graduate from college, earning a mechanical and aerospace



Edward Murphy
Of Counsel
Lipe Lyons Murphy Nahrstadt & Pontikis Ltd.

In a prized photo from his police days, Ed Murphy wore the star number 15132 on his blue-and-white checked hat.



engineering degree from Illinois Institute of Technology in 1969.

“The space program, of course, was really growing at that time and it was exciting to think about the possibilities of being involved, but I also knew that it would likely require a master’s degree or beyond if I was going to really succeed,” Murphy related.

Instead, Murphy took an engineering job with Continental Can Co., one of the largest manufacturers of tin cans in the country. A year later, he was encouraged by several friends to consider joining the Chicago Police, a place where he “could do some good in the world” as a public servant.

“I was assigned to District 9 and was part of a patrol unit that responded to run-of-the-mill requests for police services, along with a variety of crimes in progress, domestic disputes, burglaries, robberies, you name it,” Murphy indicated. “Certain days it could come at you fast and furious,

while other times there would be just a smattering of activity.”

“The best parts of being a policeman were the friends I made and the relationships I built over the nearly 10 years I spent on the job,” Murphy said. “It also was a job where you saw some of the best and worst of human behavior. What you thought was going to be a routine day or a routine call could turn into something entirely different in an instant, especially when weapons were involved.”

After a year on the patrol beat, Murphy requested an assignment with the department’s special operations unit, which concentrated its work on high crime areas of the city in hopes of thwarting illegal activity before it happened or making a quick arrest after a crime occurred.

“It was very interesting work and involved working the 6 p.m. to 2 a.m. shift, which is when most serious crimes occur,” Murphy related. “I did that for four or five years, spending a ton of time in court. In effect,

going to court was our second job, as we were constantly being called in to testify.”

His frequent trips to the witness stand whet his appetite for an opportunity to attend law school at DePaul University, where he developed an instant friendship with a fellow police officer, Ray Lyons (see related story).

“We met on the first day of law school, in contracts class, two Irish coppers from the South Side who were destined to become lifelong friends,” Murphy said of his eventual law firm partner. “Now, 47 years later, Ray still can’t get rid of me – and I’m grateful for that.”

Their mutual admiration society was cemented by a shared love of the law and the daily challenges of law enforcement, according to Murphy.

“We quickly developed a bond first as law students and then as cops, and later, of course, as law partners,” Murphy indicated. “It’s been a special friendship that has extended throughout both of our families.”

Murphy has four daughters – Katie, Karen, Mary, and Sarah – and 10 grandchildren, four of whom are now attending college. Lyons, himself the oldest of 11 children, has four sons and a bevy of grandchildren as well.

Murphy’s wife, Carol, also is an attorney, formerly serving as an in-house counsel for State Farm Insurance. The couple met while they both worked for Jacobs Williams & Montgomery in Chicago.

Murphy and his wife are avid travelers. In 2022, they took their three oldest grandchildren to London, England and to the Normandy region of France for the 68th anniversary of the D-Day landings. That area holds a special meaning for Carol as her father was a decorated veteran of World War II, according to Murphy.

“He made his third combat jump there as a member of the 82nd Airborne Division on June 6, 1944,” Murphy said of his late father-in-law. “He was a proud member

of the ‘Greatest Generation’ and was seriously wounded during the Normandy campaign, losing an eye.”

The Murphys are planning a trip to Italy in June 2024 with two other granddaughters.

Like most police officers, Murphy also found himself in harm’s way more times than he prefers to count, particularly one incident when he was a member of a special tactical unit that was a forerunner to today’s SWAT teams.


“We were in charge of running what was known as the ‘War Wagon,’ which was loaded with heavy weaponry,” Murphy explained. “One day late in our shift, we were called to respond to a hostage-taking situation at a currency exchange after an armed robbery went bad. When we arrived, it seemed like there were about 8,000 cops already there.”

After Murphy cautioned the officer-in-charge about using tear gas because of the high probability of starting a fire

inside the building, he was assigned to the roof of a nearby building as a potential sharp-shooter.

“Frankly, what I remember most about that was freezing my ass off on the roof of that building for nearly five hours while they negotiated with the two gunmen,” Murphy said with a hint of a smile.

Eventually, veteran Chicago TV news reporter Russ Ewing helped broker a deal with the gunmen to release the two female hostages.

“Fortunately, it had a happy ending, much to the credit of Ewing, who had gained a reputation as a ‘go-to person’ for bad guys seeking to surrender to police,” said Murphy. “For me, I was just glad to finally get off that roof!” 

Ed Murphy is always in good stead when surrounded by his grandchildren, which now number 10.



As a youth, attorney harbored dreams of being a career cop

By Brian Cox

San Francisco attorney John Dahlberg has an enduring respect for the skill set of beat cops.

His eight years of experience as a reserve peace officer during the “crack wars” in Oakland fostered a deep appreciation for career officers’ powers of observation and deduction that he says “Sherlock Holmes would marvel at.”

He recalls a senior officer once deducing that a woman in a crowded restaurant was a secretary after observing the length of her fingernails. Another time, while responding to an armed robbery of a cab driver, Dahlberg and the veteran cop he was training under chased a suspect into a hotel frequented by heroin addicts. The rooms they followed the suspect into were in complete disarray and a search for the gun was unproductive until Dahlberg’s partner observed that a standup vacuum seemed out of place. He unzipped the vacuum bag, reached in, and – to Dahlberg’s amazement – pulled out the gun.

“I felt like they had superpowers,” says Dahlberg of the career officers he worked with two to three nights a week from 1988-96.

He also was impressed with their interrogation skills and their ability to ascertain facts regarding an incident.

“Good street cops, I observed, were very good at talking to people in all different kinds of situations,” he says. “They could calm them or let the extremely excited person vent. They could reassure the person who was suffering. They used humor when they could. Respect was key – everyone of age was ‘sir’ or ‘ma’am.’ You did not antagonize people in front of their families, and if you were inside a person’s home, you remembered that fact.”



John Dahlberg
Partner
Dillingham & Murphy, LLP

The regular officers tended to ask open-ended questions and approached situations without any confirmation bias, which has informed Dahlberg's own style of questioning.

"We all suffer from confirmation bias," he says. "It's hard for us as lawyers – as champions and advocates – to see and empathize with the other side's point of view or the facts that the other side is implying."

Dahlberg had dreamed of being a cop since he was a kid growing up in San Francisco where his mother was a juvenile probation officer. After graduating from the University of California, Berkeley, in 1975, however, Dahlberg went on to Yale Law School, where he earned his juris doctor degree. A summer clerkship at Pillsbury Madison and Sutro – an international law firm that traces its founding to 1874 – led to his working at the firm after graduation in 1978. At Pillsbury, Dahlberg became friends with

Bill Murphy and Bill Dillingham. When "the two Bills" left to start their own firm in 1982, Dahlberg followed them two years later to help build and grow Dillingham & Murphy, where he has remained ever since.

He currently litigates a wide array of cases, including business and commercial disputes, class actions, embezzlement recovery, construction defect cases, real estate, and commercial lease issues, personal injury, professional liability, civil rights, false arrest, and other intentional tort litigation. He has a particular focus on working with clients to prevent civil trespass and private nuisance at stores and shopping centers by employing the use of restraining orders.

Dahlberg says he decided to become a reserve peace officer out of a desire to give something back to the community and as part of a legacy from his father, who served in World War II, and his great-grandfather, who fought in the Spanish-

American War one year after immigrating from Armenia.

Dahlberg graduated from the Oakland police academy in February 1988, becoming a Level I reserve peace officer.

Oakland allows for three levels of reserve officers. Level III reserve officers can perform specified, limited support duties that are not likely to result in physical arrests under supervision. Level II reserve officers can perform general law enforcement assignments while under immediate supervision. As a Level I reserve officer, however, Dahlberg could work alone and perform the same duties as full-time regular officers.

Dahlberg says the police academy taught him a valuable lesson about teamwork. He initially approached the academy as he had college and law school: Study hard and excel on his own merits.



"But that misses the point," he says. "You're supposed to do the best you can but the police academy has a military spirit in that you're just part of the team. If you're good at something, you need to share your abilities with your classmates."

One day a classmate who was a former Navy SEAL everyone looked up to confronted Dahlberg about failing to help another classmate who was having trouble understanding the law block.

"And then the light bulb went on," recalls Dahlberg. "It's all teamwork, and you don't succeed unless and until the person having the most problems on your team succeeds. It's a group effort or it's no effort."

Dahlberg says he was honored to be part of an exceptional class of reserve officers, most of whom went on to join the force as regular officers. One became deputy chief and three that he knows of became captains.

Running on a limited budget, Oakland made heavy use of reserve officers – who were volunteers – in lieu of hiring new regular officers. There was a platoon of around 50 reserve officers who covered four days out of the week. Dahlberg generally worked Friday, Saturday, and Monday nights while continuing to build his law practice during the day.

"We took every kind of call from the mythical barking dog in the hills – which I never actually got – to homicides that had just occurred," says Dahlberg. "We fought to take calls as often as we could. You could have 17 calls on a shift without lunch. We pitched in and covered full-time officers. I viewed them as my primary clients."


Dahlberg never fired his weapon at anyone, though he came close a few times that he can still recall vividly. He was in a car chase once and that was all it took before he resolved to never do that again.

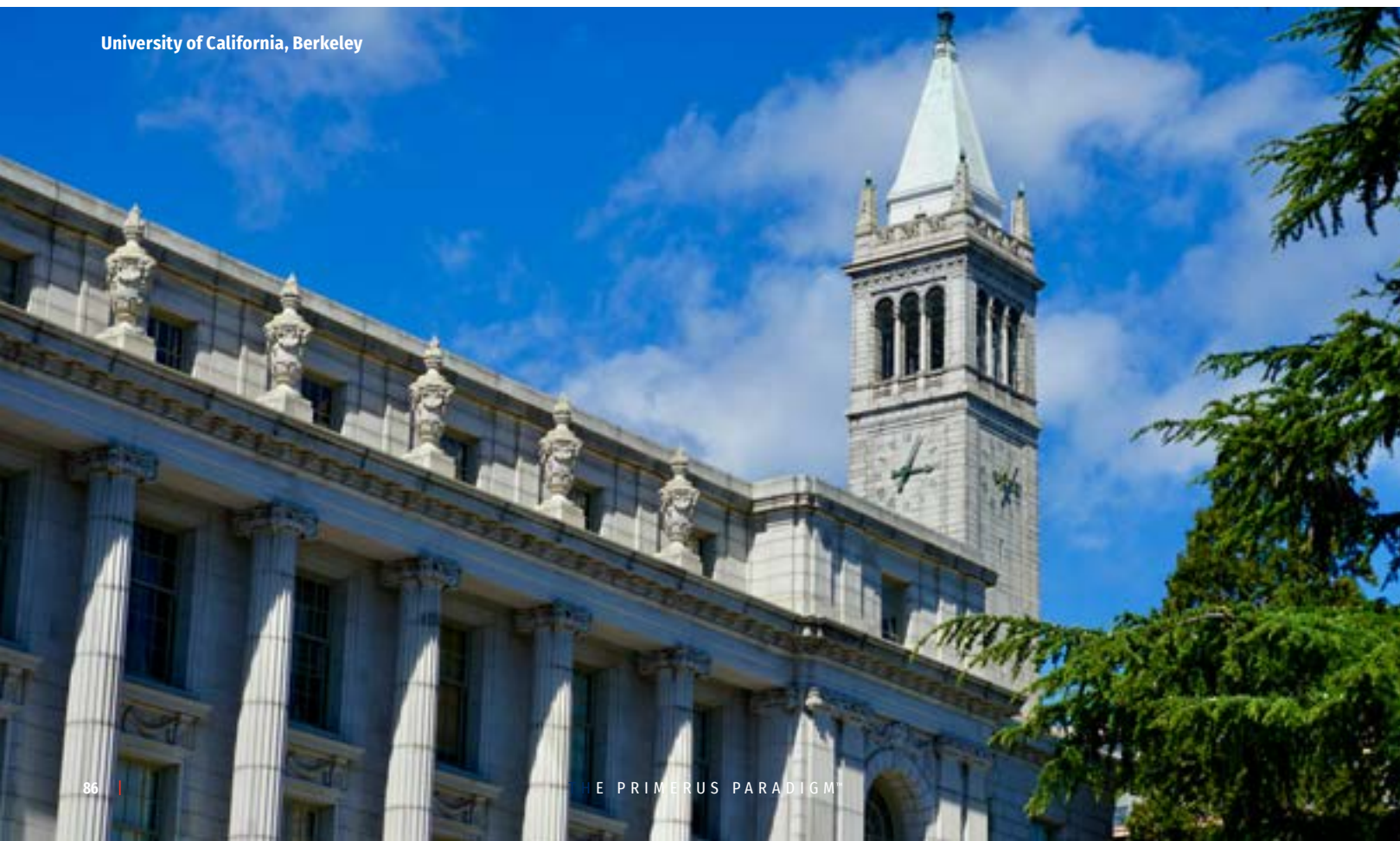
In July 1996 – after eight years on the force – Dahlberg decided to hang up his

badge after chasing a teenage suspect and realizing he was too old to be doing that anymore.

One last abiding observation Dahlberg came away with after his experience as a reserve police officer is that everybody lies to one extent or another. Victims, suspects, and witnesses – they all lie for a multitude of reasons, some that are understandable and others that are confounding.

But Dahlberg says he never felt offended or alienated by people lying to him. He generally expected it.

"People often ask, if you're exposed 8 to 15 hours a week, even as an amateur, to this river of lies, does it sour you on people? The answer is no. First of all, you meet a lot of really good people who are having the worst day of their life," he says. "I actually liked people better after 8 years of police work than I did before." 



Treasured Times

Memories could fill a book for former Chicago officer

By Tom Kirvan



Ray Lyons, Jr.
Of Counsel
Lipe Lyons Murphy Nahrstadt & Pontikis Ltd.

Ray Lyons is the consummate South Sider, born and raised in a hardscrabble working-class neighborhood of Chicago that during his formative years was heavily populated with Irish Catholic families who valued hard work, education, and faith while also living through the eternal ups and downs of the city's professional sports teams.

The oldest of 11 children, Lyons and his wife, Diane, have four sons of their own, ranging in age from 30 to 42 who have blessed their parents with seven grandchildren.

"My family means everything to me and the importance of it was ingrained in me from an early age," said Lyons, one of the five founding partners of Lipe Lyons Murphy Nahrstadt & Pontikis Ltd. in Chicago, the nation's third largest city that he still calls home. "When you are part of a large family, you gain a special appreciation for the value of teamwork."

Now Of Counsel with the insurance defense firm, Lyons developed an even greater appreciation for the team approach while working for the Chicago Police Department from 1974-80, a time when he pulled double duty while studying for his law degree at DePaul University College of Law.

"I was primarily a street cop, walking the beat in my old neighborhood on the South Side, which at the time was a changing and challenging place with rising crime rates," said Lyons, who earned a degree in mathematics from Loyola University of Chicago in 1973. "It was a time when I received my baptism under fire."

It doubled as a time when he built lifelong bonds with his brethren on the police force, somewhat mirroring the close camaraderie that developed between the fictional characters in "The Choirboys," the 1975 novel written by officer-turned-

author Joseph Wambaugh. While the setting for Wambaugh's book was Los Angeles, Lyons found that many of the characters could have been portrayed in real life by some of the officers he came to know in Chicago.

"The book offered a very realistic look at life as a big city cop, and everyone I knew who read the book could easily identify certain characters that resembled officers in Chicago," Lyons related, emphasizing how much he enjoyed being part of the "police brotherhood."

Like the cops in the book, Lyons soon learned to trust his natural instincts as a police officer while also learning that "human nature is so predictable" when dealing with hardened criminals.

"It doesn't take long to develop an ability to sift through the BS and to get to the heart of the matter," Lyons said of his knack for uncovering the truth. "After you spend a certain amount of time on the job, your antennas go up when something doesn't seem quite right."

It was a talent he shared with one of his fellow police officers, Ed Murphy, whom he met on the first day of law school at DePaul and would later become his longtime law partner and best friend (see related story). The two would soon be taught the value of always being prepared for battle, a lesson imparted by fellow patrolman Bob Desjardins, otherwise known as "Frenchy."

"Frenchy always had a huge cache of weapons at his disposal," Lyons indicated. "He made the decision to be well-armed after he got shot six times while responding to a domestic dispute. So, whenever we had to respond to a situation where shots had been fired, we would wait until Frenchy showed up because he had the kind of artillery that might be needed."

Lyons, who said that he "discharged my weapon three or four times" over the course of his career, made the decision to attend law school after regularly appearing in court to testify in police cases where he was the arresting officer.

"It seemed like I was always in court for one reason or another, and I found it fascinating," Lyons said of his reasoning

for pursuing a career in the law. "The department also had a generous tuition reimbursement program that made it attractive and affordable. Even though I really enjoyed being a cop, I figured that a legal career would offer greater financial security and would be a whole lot safer."

Lyons, who graduated first in his class at the Chicago Police Training Academy, was equally impressive in law school, earning his juris doctorate *magna cum laude*. His exceptional academic record and his police background helped him land a coveted job with one of Chicago's premier insurance defense law firms, Jacobs Williams & Montgomery, where Lyons would spend much of his legal career before helping form Lipe Lyons Murphy Nahrstadt & Pontikis Ltd. in 2012.

Remarkably, the decision by the five named partners to branch off did not cause any ill will with their former firm, according to Lyons. There were no hard feelings, lawsuits, or threats to exact financial revenge. In fact, "they threw us a party and wished us good luck" with the new legal venture, said Lyons, who early in his life considered entering the priesthood.

Now, as one of the senior members of the Chicago firm, Lyons is more than content with his role as mentor, advisor, and business developer. It is a position he is particularly well suited for after developing a reputation as one of the finest trial lawyers in Illinois while litigating hundreds of cases in state and federal courts throughout the United States. Among the clients he has successfully represented include TruGreen, Terminix, ServiceMaster, Gehl Company, Manchester Tank, McWane, Amerex, Minnesota Lawyers Mutual Insurance Company, and Zurich Insurance Company among many others.


"It's a job I have loved, particularly because of the relationships I've



developed with my colleagues, clients, and opposing counsel over the years," said Lyons, who has been active with the product liability group of the Primerus Defense Institute.

Lyons and his wife, Diane, celebrated their 48th anniversary this year, and relish the time they can spend with their four sons – Ray, Chris, Nick, and Scott – and their respective families. Each son is an engineering alum of the University of Illinois, and all have a gift for speaking several languages.

"My wife is a retired Spanish teacher, so she passed along her language ability to our sons," said Lyons. "As a math major in college, I will take some credit for their engineering ability."

As Lyons reflects on his professional and personal careers with satisfaction, he "also is looking forward to concentrating on enjoying more time" with his family, noting that the "family legacy continues to grow with the celebration of the recent birth of our seventh grandchild, Zelmira Lyons." 

During a recent warm weather vacation, Ray Lyons and his wife, Diane, were surrounded by their family. Pictured (l-r): Scott; Erin, Logan, Olive, and Ray III; Ray Jr. and Diane; Beau, Laura, Dylan, Nick, and Lilah; and Chris and Zahara. In the photo on the facing page are Chris's wife Shadia, holding the couple's newly born second daughter, Zelmira.



Police beat took a backseat to legal career for attorney with New Orleans law firm

By Tom Kirvan

Attigator for more than 40 years in New Orleans, Gordon Arata attorney Terry Knister learned to be fast on his feet at an early age. Moving eight times before reaching the age of 16 will help develop that certain skill, Knister admitted.

“I was always making new friends,” Knister quipped, acknowledging the importance of shifting gears quickly as the son of a U.S. Navy officer who was a Korean War veteran.

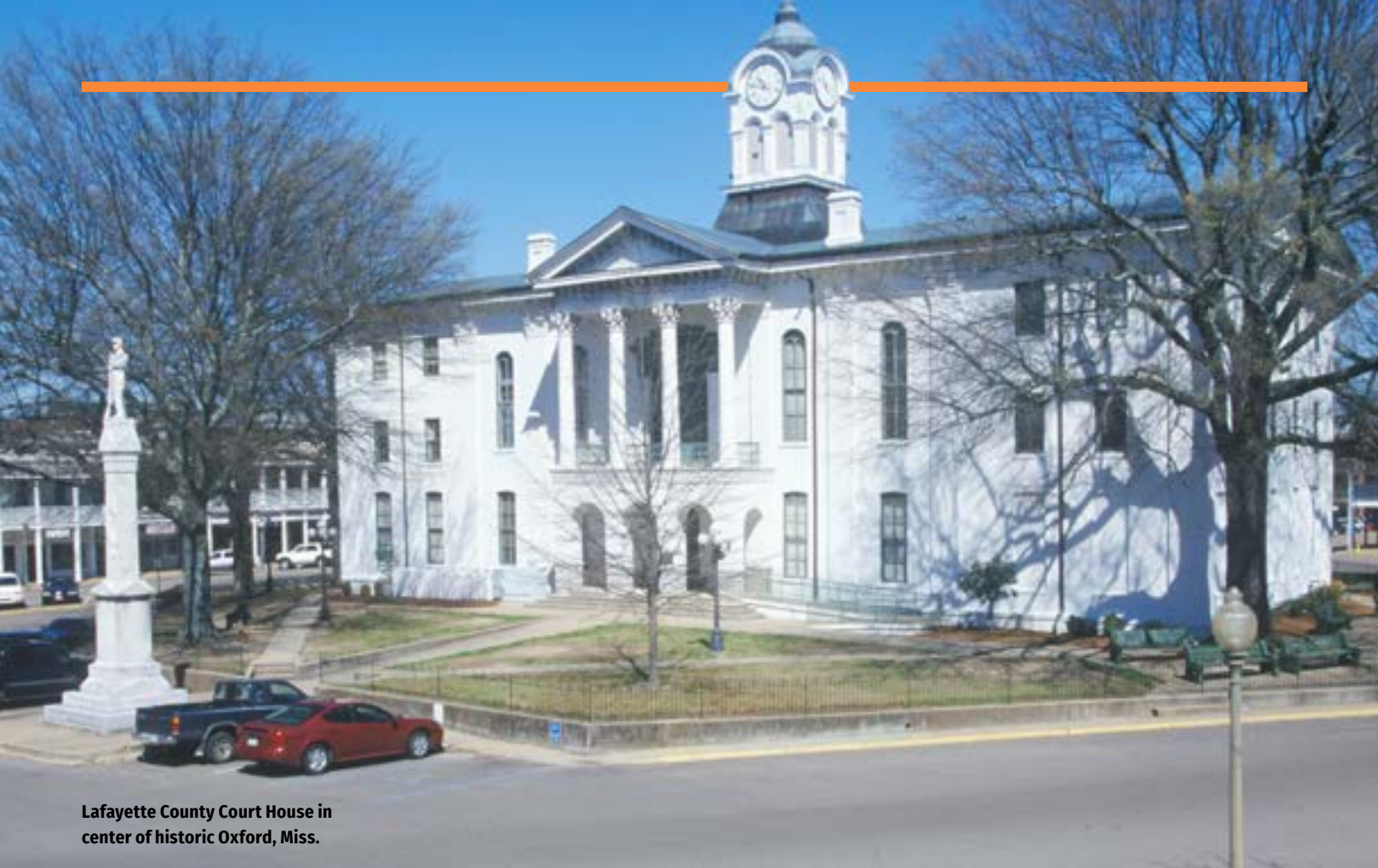
Knister spent his formative years in the New York City area before migrating to the South when his now 92-year-old father (George) took a job with American Can Co., eventually leading to his enrollment at the University of Mississippi in Oxford where he would obtain his bachelor and law degrees.

The oldest public university in Mississippi, Ole Miss gained unwanted national attention in 1962 when various attempts to desegregate the school were blocked by state officials and avowed white supremacists in a violent standoff with federal officers and the National Guard. Before James Meredith became the first African American student to enroll at Ole Miss on October 1, 1962, more than 13,000 soldiers had been deployed to quell rioting that left scores injured and two civilians dead.

The widespread violence, not surprisingly, put Oxford on the federal map for years to come and would pique Knister’s interest in pursuing a law enforcement career with the FBI. But before that could become a possibility, Knister was bent on proving his chops as a member of the Oxford police force, working there for two years in the late 1970s while earning his undergraduate degree in a criminal justice program at Ole Miss.



Terrence Knister
Member
Gordon Arata



Lafayette County Court House in center of historic Oxford, Miss.

“I started off as an intern with the Oxford Police Department and then was allowed to continue working with them while going to school,” Knister said of his two years as a police officer. “I wanted to work with the FBI, which is why I decided to go to law school.”

Knister worked full time as a policeman while completing his undergraduate degree, often attending classes dressed in full uniform out of necessity because of his busy work/school schedule.

“I made my contacts (with the FBI) and there was a satellite office of the FBI in Oxford,” he said. “This was just a few years after the integration of Ole Miss and Oxford was still being watched and was on the federal government’s radar.”

And for good reason Knister would later discover as he recounted the details of a cross-burning incident involving the Ku Klux Klan in 1977.

“I ended up arresting the Grand Wizard of the Northeast Mississippi KKK,” Knister said of that notorious night more than 45 years ago. “He and his fellow Klansmen snuck into town one Saturday night to burn a cross in front of Oxford City Hall. They didn’t make their escape very well, as we arrested four of them.”

The four suspects were taken into custody without incident, and the ringleader reportedly received a three-year jail sentence for the hate crime, according to Knister.

“Driving back to the police station, I had the Grand Wizard in the back of the patrol car when I got a call on the radio from the dispatcher telling me to call my girlfriend when I got in,” Knister recalled. “So, I called my girlfriend and asked her what was the matter and she said that ‘One of my sorority sisters just saw you at the Square . . . and that you were standing in front of a burning cross.’”

Accordingly, Knister then had some explaining to do for the sake of domestic tranquility, quickly dispelling any concern from his girlfriend.

In 1977, Knister had his first brush with police fame when his photo appeared on the front page of the August 5, 1977 edition of The Oxford Eagle. There, atop a story about then-President Jimmy Carter signing a \$1 billion piece of youth employment legislation, was a photo of Knister standing smartly with two of his police colleagues after making a marijuana bust – with evidence of the home-grown weed in their hands.

“Everyone enjoyed a good marijuana bust in the ‘70s,” Knister said with a laugh.

The plants were cultivated by an Ole Miss student who made a critical mistake in his growing operation, according to Knister.

“He had a 6-foot fence in his back yard and the plants grew to 7 feet tall,” Knister said of the student’s blunder. “I felt kind of bad for him, since it appeared that the plants were mainly for his own consumption and not for distribution.”

Upon graduating from law school in 1981, Knister decided to eschew plans to be an FBI agent in favor of becoming a trial attorney. The decision, of course, proved wise as he has enjoyed a successful 42-year legal career as a prominent New Orleans attorney specializing in toxic tort litigation.

The father of three daughters, ranging in age from 19 to 32, Knister has been with Gordon Arata for the past 22 years, periodically defending “oil and gas companies in numerous ‘legacy’ lawsuits asserting environmental damage claims typically in the hundreds of millions of dollars.”

He currently is involved in defending a steel fabricating company that is being sued for its alleged role in the Hard Rock Hotel construction collapse that killed three workers and injured nearly 100 others in 2019.

The case, which was delayed by the pandemic and by the massive job of securing and cleaning up the construction site, involves more than 400 plaintiffs, multiple defendants, and nearly every major law firm in New Orleans, according to Knister.

“It’s a very complicated case that hasn’t even reached the deposition stage yet,” said Knister, estimating that the matter could take years to resolve.

Among those assisting Knister with the case is a familiar face – his oldest daughter, Marianna Knister Downer, who joined the firm in 2021. An alumna of Louisiana State University, Downer earned her law degree from LSU as well

and previously worked for four years in Washington, D.C. for former Senator Mary Landrieu.

Her role with the firm delights her father to no end.

“She is an excellent attorney and earned the opportunity here entirely on her own merit,” Knister said proudly. “I stayed out of the interview process from the start and didn’t want to be copied on any e-mails or involved in any discussions about her.”

Now, as an up-and-coming associate with Gordon Arata, Downer regularly interacts with her father on a variety of legal matters and has made a positive impression on colleagues and clients alike, according to her dad.

“People like her a lot more than me, that much is clear,” Knister said with a grin.



Captured pot

Detective Billy Smith, Patrolman Steve Johnson and Patrolman Terry Knister display marijuana plants seized in the possession of William James Throgmole Jr., an Ole Miss student from Columbus. Throgmole is free on \$1000 bond and has been bonded over to a circuit court Grand Jury on the felony charge of possession of a controlled substance. Throgmole has also been held \$200 by Justice Court Judge Mary Bonds for possession of paraphernalia, a misdemeanor. Investigation of the case was done by Oxford police, the Sheriff's Department and the State Narcotics Bureau. —Staff photo by Stead

Carter signs \$1 billion youth employment bill

By NEILAN THOMAS
UPI White House Reporter
WASHINGTON (UPI)—President Carter today signed into law a bill providing \$1 billion to create 500,000 jobs for young people. He called it a "great stride forward to correct these in our society."
The President, preparing to leave

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