

Louisiana attorney learned the ropes in a family store



By Brian Cox

Louisiana attorney J.P. Graf has a few mementos of success in his office. On one wall hangs a pair of teals he bagged while duck hunting; on the wall behind his desk there is a buck's head trophy from a hunt he went on with his father-in-law in Texas. And leaning against a bookcase in the corner is a heavy, 5-foot extension of casing pipe.

The pipe section was evidence in a recent case in which Graf represented an oil exploration company in a contentious claim over a parted production casing. At the end of the 5-day trial, Graf and his team obtained a unanimous jury verdict and a multi-million-dollar award against a pipe inspection company.

"That was a fun win," recalls Graf, who is an associate at Gordon Arata in Lafayette, La., where he represents clients in commercial disputes and litigation, including energy, construction, banking, property, and general commercial litigation. He is also experienced in product liability, premises liability, industrial accidents, and maritime and offshore matters.

Graf is a native Louisianan, born and raised in Crowley, a small town with a population approaching 12,000 situated about 30 minutes west of Lafayette.

His family has run Gremillion's Drug Store in Crowley since his grandfather, Paul Broussard, bought the business in 1965. When



Attorney J.P. Graf was named Outstanding Young Lawyer by the Lafayette Bar Association in 2022. Presenting him the award is Judge Royal Colbert and attorney J. Derek Aswell.

Broussard died in an auto accident, Graf's grandmother took over running the store and remains the owner at the age of 82. Graf's mother, Julie, who was in high school at the time her father died, went on to become a pharmacist and has been the pharmacist at Gremillion's since 1982.

The two women have had a tremendous influence on Graf's understanding of hard work and dedication.

Growing up, Graf spent many afternoons after school at the family drugstore and remembers often accompanying his mother on weekend house calls. The experiences taught him lessons he carries over into his law practice.

"Being around a family-owned business my whole life, you learn quick it's not a 9-to-5 job," says Graf. "You go above and beyond to make sure your customers are happy with you because it's competitive. Customer interaction was very important. People came to the pharmacy because of my mom."

The pharmacy may also be Graf's earliest connection to the law profession. The notorious Louisiana governor, Edwin Edwards, who was found guilty in 2001 of racketeering charges, had his law offices above the pharmacy.

An All-State tight end and defensive lineman at Notre Dame Catholic High School of Acadia Parish, Graf helped propel his team to the state championship several times and as an adult, he is an avid college football fan.

At the University of Louisiana at Lafayette, Graf explored several majors, including pharmacy, accounting, and engineering, until he settled on political science with the aim of going to law school.

"Being a lawyer was always romanticized to me," says Graf, who is the first lawyer in his family. "A lawyer was someone who wore a suit every day and who was respected by everyone."

Graf's father, a Californian who ended up in Crowley on a business venture, was a teacher, who passed away from kidney failure when Graf was 21, just before he was set to start law school.

The loss of his father was a shock to the family, but Graf stayed the course and enrolled at Louisiana State University (LSU) in Baton Rouge.

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Attorney JP Graf enjoys the waterways of Louisiana with his daughters, Annie and Laura.

“I knew what my plan was,” says Graf. “My dad was an incredibly proud father. It made things tougher with him not being there, but it didn’t affect the plan.”

While at LSU Law, Graf clerked for the Hon. Patrick J. Hanna, U.S. Magistrate Judge for the Western District of Louisiana, where he got to “see a little bit of how the sausage was made.” He also interned at the U.S. Attorney’s Office in New Orleans, where he first gave thought to becoming a prosecutor.

But that ambition changed during his 3L year when he was hired at Anderson, Dozier, Blanda & Saltzman, a personal injury firm where he was taken under the wing of influential mentors.

“The last thing I thought I’d be is a plaintiffs personal injury lawyer,” says Graf, “but it turned out to be awesome. I quickly learned that I really liked representing folks who were being taken advantage of or the victims of some sort of negligence or wrongdoing.”

At the firm, Graf says he learned to be a professional lawyer and how to try a case. He learned how to talk to people who have never been involved with a lawsuit and how to address their concerns.

“You really do have the power to effect change,” he says. “There are avenues that you can make a positive change in people’s life, and I’m proud of the work I did. It shaped my perspective on the court system and legal profession.”

Graf was with the firm for nearly five years before joining Gordon Arata in May 2022, the same year Graf was named Outstanding Young Lawyer by the Lafayette Bar Association.

Graf had a lot of real life and significant litigation experience under his belt and was ready for a new challenge when Gordon Arata approached him with the opportunity to represent clients in business disputes.

“It was much different from what I was doing,” says Graf. “I was ready for a change, but it had to be the right change. It was the right fit and it made a lot of sense.”

Gordon Arata is a full-service law firm that represents clients across a wide array of industries, including energy, maritime, chemical, construction, finance, banking, real estate, telecommunications, and public utilities. The firm has offices in New Orleans and Lafayette.

“In the business world, it’s important to not only understand the issue that a client is having, but to also understand the whole industry,” says Graf of his practice. “When you’re giving a client advice, you need to consider their business as a whole.”

He was recently asked to represent a NIL Collective, an organization formed by prominent alumni and influential supporters to provide naming, image, and licensing rights for student-athletes. Collectives, which are independent of a university, began forming after the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in *National Collegiate Athletic Association v. Alston* that limitations on benefits for college athletes were unconstitutional.



The Graf family: JP and Carli poolside with their daughters Annie and Laura.

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“It’s a new industry, in general,” says Graf. “It’s kind of the wild, wild west at this point. There are not many rules on it. What I want to do is give them the best advice on avoiding common issues that come up in any business.”

Graf and his wife, Carli, married following his graduation from law school and honeymooned in Mexico after he took the bar exam. She studied mass communications at LSU and now works at Parish Brewing Company. The couple has two daughters – Annie, 2, and Laura, 1.

As part of building his practice, Graf stays active with the Lafayette Bar Association. He has been recognized as a top young professional in the legal industry by his peers, including Louisiana Super Lawyers Rising Stars, The National Trial Lawyers: Top 40 under 40, and Top Lawyers in Acadiana. He is active in the Young Lawyers Section of the Lafayette Bar Association, where he serves as a board member and participates in community outreach events, such as Wills for Heroes and Holiday Giving Project.

“My face is out there,” he says. “I try to be involved. I try to say ‘yes’ to a lot of things.”



An avid duck and deer hunter when he gets the chance, JP has this trophy buck from a hunt in Texas mounted on his office wall.