Whether representing the federal government or one of the Fortune 500, Michael H. King (BS ’68, JD ’70) strives for the best result for his clients. The Chicago lawyer who began his career with the United States Department of Justice now travels the world as managing partner of the Chicago office of mega-firm Dewey & LeBoeuf.
Michael H. King, whose long career extends from helping prosecute one of the nation’s biggest robberies to defending a paper maker in a major antitrust case.

Now managing partner of the Chicago office of Dewey & LeBoeuf, King’s initial decision to pursue law was inspired by his father, a lawyer and an accountant.

“I always assumed I’d go into the law,” King says. “I thought I’d go into criminal defense law, however; it never occurred to me I’d be in a law firm with 1,500 lawyers.”

King has done both, and more, in a legal career that spans nearly four decades. His first job, through the Justice Department’s Honors Program, was as a prosecutor with its organized crime and racketeering task force. He started two days after graduating from law school in 1970.

King reels off recollections of his work with the task force and then as an assistant to United States Attorney James Thompson, who later became governor of Illinois.

Among the most memorable cases was the Purolator Vault robbery. Sophisticated thieves bypassed an alarm system and got away with $4.3 million. They fled to the Cayman Islands, deposited their haul in a bank, and then got arrested. At the time, it was the biggest cash theft in American history and made headlines around the world.

OTHER CASES INVOLVED an attempt to sell intellectual property stolen from Monsanto Corporation in St. Louis to a Chicago competitor, corruption in the Chicago police department and cash payoffs in the Chicago City Hall licensing department, and a drug bust involving 228 pounds of cocaine. “The lessons from those early years at the Justice Department have carried with me,” he says.

After almost six years in government service, King moved on. He and his wife Candy (AB ’68) had two children, and he was ready for a change. (The couple had met at Washington University and married during law school; they now have five grandchildren.)

Antonow & Fink, a small firm with 30 lawyers, hired him to build its litigation department. He made partner in a year. When the firm was engaged to help defend a paper manufacturer indicted for price-fixing, it tapped King because he was its only member with significant experience in criminal law.

The litigation lasted more than five years, sprawled across the country into multiple districts, and attracted participants from major firms in Chicago, New York, and Washington, D.C.

More than a billion dollars in damages was at stake. The Folding Carton Antitrust Litigation, as it became known, was the country’s biggest antitrust case at the time. A corresponding, and even larger case, the Corrugated Antitrust Litigation soon followed.

King got to know the rules of civil procedure “at a pretty sophisticated level.” After taking the measure of the other lawyers in the case, King concluded he could play in the big leagues. “That really launched my private practice,” he says.

In early 1979, he took the antitrust cases with him to one of Chicago’s largest firms, Ross & Hardies. The defendant, Consolidated Packaging Corporation, remained a major client for years. King stayed with Ross for more than two decades, maintaining a diverse litigation practice. He headed the litigation department and recruiting committee, and also served on the executive committee, including as chairman for four years.

In a major toxic waste case, King represented a company whose underground tank leaked trichloroethylene, an industrial solvent, threatening a drinking water source in Kearney, Nebraska. The company faced several civil lawsuits, a criminal grand jury probe, and an OSHA investigation. He devised a novel strategy that included suing the plaintiffs’ lawyers to force them to disclose their employee clients and to enjoin their interfering with the remediation efforts.

“We managed to get rid of the investigations,” he recalls. “They were a responsible company. They were going to fix things, and they did it without anybody breathing down their neck. We didn’t pay a nickel to anybody. It was a great result.”

INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY LAW gradually became a significant part of his focus. King successfully represented a company that hired away a competitor’s 200 senior managers, demonstrating that “not one of the people brought along any intellectual property.” He also has tried a variety of patent infringement cases.

In 2003, Ross merged with McGuireWoods. King departed two years later to open the Chicago office of LeBoeuf, Lamb, Greene & MacRae, a major international firm based in New York.

“I wanted a more Eastern-oriented practice. The big action comes out of the East, the financial centers,” King says. “I was looking for more high-stakes, high-quality stuff.”

Last year, his LeBoeuf team got a federal court to dismiss a lawsuit that threatened to block the production of Boeing 737s because a former subcontractor claimed title to an essential part in the tail, which Eaton Corporation assembles.

LeBoeuf merged in October 2007 with Dewey Ballantine, another major New York firm. King oversees the Chicago office with 40 lawyers and serves on the policy (steering) committee of the almost 500-member litigation department of the combined firm. “We have real firepower,” King says in describing the litigation strength.

Over the years, King has represented JPMorgan Chase, BP, CNH, Eaton, and McDonald’s in cases across the country, and in several foreign countries including China, Germany, France, and Brazil. With Dewey & LeBoeuf, his practice has gone more global, from London to Moscow to Johannesburg. He also has received numerous professional recognitions and has served as a frequent writer, lecturer, and media commentator on current legal issues.