Alumnus Helps Level Playing Field

FIRM: Donald L. Schlapprizzi PC, St. Louis
www.schlapprizzipc.com

ATTORNEYS: Donald L. Schlapprizzi, JD ’59, along with Linda C. Powers, Erin M. Cobb, and Harold L. Whitfield, JD ’66

AREAS OF PRACTICE: Personal Injury Trial Practice—vehicle-truck crashes, products liability, medical malpractice, business litigation, workers’ compensation

BRIEF BACKGROUND: Donald Schlapprizzi founded his present firm in 1981. He practices as a jury trial lawyer representing individuals in personal injury litigation. Schlapprizzi is the recipient of the Award of Honor from the Lawyers Association of St. Louis and of the Missouri Bar Foundation Trial Lawyers Award. He is a Fellow of the American College of Trial Lawyers, of the International Academy of Trial Lawyers, of the International Academy of Barristers, and of the International Society of Barristers. Past president of both the Missouri Trial Lawyers Association and the Lawyers Association of St. Louis, he served on the Missouri Supreme Court Jury Instructions Committee and the Civil Procedure Committee of the American College of Trial Lawyers.

Q. Why did you choose your particular area of practice?

Coming from a competitive, athletic background and modest economic means, in some ways, had predetermined my law practice interest. Growing up, I had always despised bullies and those who lauded power over those who had no voice. Then, I had the opportunity to join the small law firm dedicated to representation of the types of individuals in whom I had an interest. It has been very rewarding, and I have never been sorry, except in those scattered matters where, ultimately, I had to share in the bitter disappointment with a client for whom we had not been successful.

Q. What advice would you have for someone interested in pursuing this area of law?

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Q. Do you feel that your firm size is a plus, a minus, or a nonfactor in your practice?

In the area of representing injured and damaged individuals, I believe there is an advantage to a small firm because of the individualized attention that each client can receive. This does not mean that a large firm is foreclosed from this because there are certainly wonderfully talented lawyers in larger firms. I believe, however, that the smaller firm creates a more comfortable atmosphere for the client. We also follow up with our clients at the conclusion of each case through a questionnaire. The responses have been overwhelmingly gracious and positive, but occasionally there is a criticism, which we take to heart and then implement ways to improve in that area. This is a plus in a small firm.

Q. What has been the most rewarding aspect of your practice?

I really like the people I represent, who come from all walks of life, and I enjoy being successful on their behalf. It is a unique opportunity to watch the civil jury system in action—seeing a jury struggle with conflicting contentions and still be able to arrive at a fair and just result. In my personal experience, without this system, a heroic quadriplegic woman would not have been able to sustain her existence; dispirited parents of a woefully challenged baby would not have the security of seeing that their child would be afforded the necessary care; and a 9½-month jury trial would not have resulted in helping some 1,200 people.

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Donald Schlapprizzi argues before the Supreme Court of Missouri.

ing breed considering the emphasis on alternative dispute resolution and the presumptive tarnishing of the trial lawyer image. These challenges are all the more reason to set your legal career in this direction because there continues to be the need not to be intimidated and to protect individual rights. I am excited that my son, Craig, who is graduating from Washington University Law in May, will pursue trial practice with me, and my daughter, Antoinette, is a second-year law student also at my alma mater.