

# Still Living the Good Life

At the age of 96, alumnus Joseph Chused maintains a robust life and law practice.

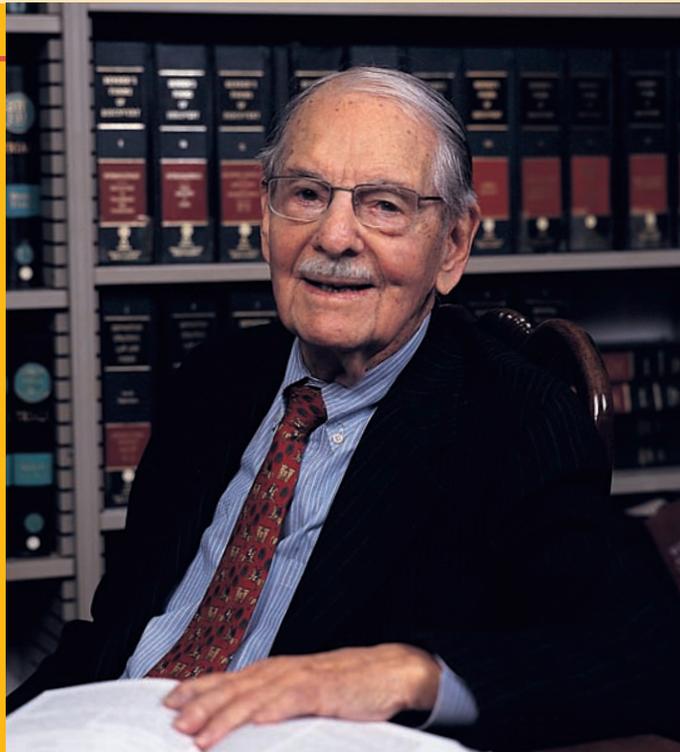
by Timothy Fox

Three days a week Joseph Chused, JD '30, goes into the law offices of Bini, Steib, Reid & Kohn in St. Louis—the firm he helped found in 1934—to counsel attorneys and clients he calls “my good friends.”

On Tuesdays and Thursdays, just as he's done for the past 20 years, this 96-year-old alumnus heads to the Mid-County YMCA in Brentwood for aerobics. “I'm now the only man in the class,” notes Chused, whose workout buddies are apparently quite taken with him. Every year they prepare a birthday dinner for him that celebrates his continuing role in their lives, as well as the remarkable life he has lived for nearly a century.

Born in East St. Louis, Illinois, on October 28, 1908, Chused remembers the tragic race riot that rocked that community when he was nine years old: “It was never the same after that.”

Three years later the family—his father, mother, brother, three sisters, and Chused—moved to Kansas City. After about a year, they settled permanently in St. Louis' Central West End.



David Kilper

**“The outstanding education I received at Washington University was invaluable to me throughout my career. I enjoyed every minute of the law and have had a good life.” Joseph Chused, JD '30**

Chused entered Soldan High School as a sophomore in the early 1920s.

“Those were good years in the economy, and I made up my mind that I was going to study the law when I graduated,” he recalls.

Chused discovered his love of physical activity at Soldan, joining the boxing club, running track, and playing tennis.

“My friend, Ernie Bashford, and I were real tennis nuts,” he remembers. “We'd go to the Forest Park tennis courts to play at 9 in the morning. At noon we'd go to Joe Garavelli's, at DeBaliviere and DeGiverville, to get a roast beef sandwich for a dime and a Coke for a nickel. Then we'd go back to the courts and play until dark. That's how I spent my summers.”

In spring 1925 Chused graduated from Soldan at the age of 16, ready to enter Washington University that fall.

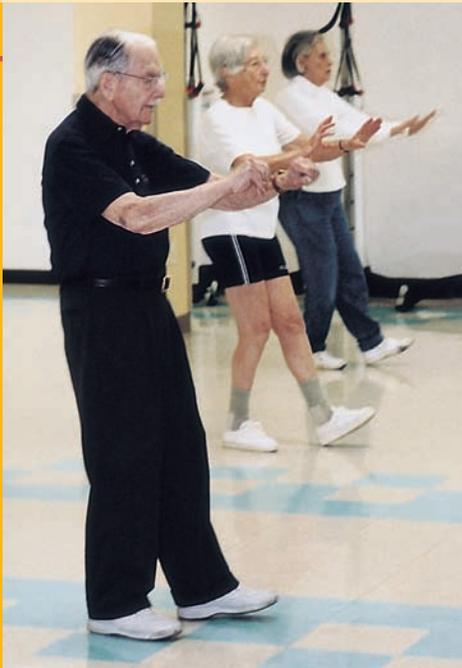
Today's law students would not recognize the University that Chused entered 80 years ago. Then housed in January Hall, the School of Law required just two years of undergrad-

uate study and three years of legal study. A small, but accomplished, group of professors taught Chused's class of about 40 students.

“I was very fortunate because of the excellent professors I had,” Chused says. “I studied under Tyrrell Williams, Ralph Fuchs, Wiley B. Rutledge, Dean William Green Hale, and others. They were all outstanding legal scholars. In fact, Rutledge went on to become a

United States Supreme Court justice.” (For more on Justice Rutledge, see pages 12–13.)

Graduation from high school had marked the end of Chused’s long sum-



**Joseph Chused regularly works out at the Mid-County YMCA.**

mer days playing tennis. Summertime now meant working to scrape up college tuition: \$250 a year. “It was very hard to get that money together. Many guys in my law school class were working their way through school. I was one of the many,” he says.

Recognizing the difficulties of funding legal education from his own experiences, today Chused sponsors the Joseph and Marie Chused Scholarship, which annually supports a law student through the Scholars in Law Program.

Even harder times came when the stock market crashed in 1929. “When I

graduated from law school, the whole world was going to hell,” Chused says. “We walked the streets trying to get a job. The law offices suffered along with everything else. Some guys even dropped the idea of practicing law.”

The Great Depression, however, proved to be a boon for bankruptcy law. While visiting a downtown bankruptcy firm, Chused met Max W. Kramer, an attorney eight years his senior. The two took a liking to each other, and Chused went to work for the firm for \$25 a month, with the proviso that he could retain any fees he earned from his own clients.

In 1934 Chused accepted Kramer’s invitation to become his partner, creating the firm of Kramer & Chused. When the older attorney retired in the mid-1970s, Chused took over the firm, which became Chused, Bini, Steib, Reid & Kohn. He specialized in trusts, estates, probate, real estate, contracts, and corporate and business law.

Chused started spending less time at the firm when he was in his early 80s, but continued with his practice. In 1996 he became of counsel.

“The outstanding education I received at Washington University was invaluable to me throughout my career,” he says. “I enjoyed every minute of the law and have had a good life.”

Chused’s next challenge would be his greatest—caring for his wife, Marie, during her five-year struggle with Alzheimer’s disease.

Chused had met his future wife, then a Washington University student, in 1931 outside January Hall, where he was doing legal research. The couple married seven years later. They had two sons—Thomas, a doctor recently retired from the National Institutes of

Health, and Richard, a law professor at Georgetown University. Among his four grandchildren is Sam, a sophomore at Washington University.

As it had throughout his life, Chused’s faith sustained him during his wife’s illness. A member of Congregation Shaare Emeth since 1937, Chused has served as president of the congregation and of the temple’s men’s club; he is also a life member of the board of directors. In 1988 he and his wife established the Chused Israel Experience fund to help members of the confirmation class travel to Israel.

Marie Chused died on April 15, 2002.

“She was a remarkable woman,” he says. “Among her many contributions to the community, she was chair of the Citizen’s Committee to Improve Homer G. Phillips Hospital, which served the city’s African-American community. She was also president of the St. Louis Section of the National Council of Jewish Women and helped establish the Delcrest Apartments (now The Crown Center) in University City for citizens of limited means. In memory of my wife, I’m still active there and work with the executive director.”

The couple also shared a love of golf. Chused played for more than 75 years, the last 40 or so at Forest Hills Country Club, where he was a charter member.

Today The Gatesworth is home for Chused. This retirement community offers restaurants, entertainment and special programs, a swimming pool, and a full exercise room. But don’t expect to see Chused exercising there—he prefers the Mid-County YMCA. “The exercise activities at The Gatesworth are very nice,” he reports, “but they are not strenuous enough for me.” ♦