

Stamford law firm Wofsey, Rosen, Kweskin and Kuriansky 100 years old this year

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STAMFORD — In the world of litigation, few partnerships survive the test of time. Warring egos, grinding work hours and backstabbing partners play their part in the eventual breakup of many law firms.

Yet one Stamford law practice managed to turn 100 this year.

The firm, Wofsey, Rosen, Kweskin and Kuriansky, has been practicing law since Stamford was a sleepy burg of 35,000 in 1915, when Abe Wofsey, a Russian immigrant and New York University graduate, hung his shingle in the city.

It didn't take long for Wofsey to make his mark. By 1918, when the city was a manufacturing hub, Wofsey was appointed the City Court's assistant prosecutor, worked his way up to become chief prosecutor, then became the court's first Jewish judge. Wofsey took on other partners through the years - including his brother, Michael - before his death of a heart attack at the end of 1944. The firm solidified under its current name in 1952.

Lawyer Ed Kweskin's father, Sydney, joined firm in 1946 and became a founding partner. The younger Kweskin credited the firm's longevity, it now has 21 attorneys, to always putting clients and loyalty first.

A few recent notable cases from Wofsey, Rosen, Kweskin and Kuriansky:

The State vs. Mooney: Attorney Emanuel Margolis helped overturn the 1989 murder conviction of homeless man David Mooney by calling into question the legality of a police search of Mooney's belongings beneath Interstate-91 in New Haven. Police found a belt matching the waist size of the dead victim, \$700 in stolen coins and a pair of blood-stained pants in a duffel bag and cardboard box.

For the first time in the state, Margolis argued that the privacy of homeless people was protected by the Fourth Amendment, which protects against improper search and seizure

Juan F. vs. The State: Steven Frederick and other Wofsey attorneys have been involved in this ongoing litigation since it began in 1989 with a boy, Juan F., who had been shuttled among foster homes from age 6 to 10 without adequate efforts being made to find him a home after he was taken away from his mother.

The class action suit resulted in fewer children being abused in foster care, more investigations into abuse and neglect within the system, a sharp increase in the number of siblings placed together in foster care, more face-to-face caseworker visits with children, and more children being placed with relatives.

Breen vs. Selective Service Board: Margolis took the case of Westport resident and draft resister Timothy Breen, who had surrendered his draft card to his minister in Boston, Mass., to protest the Vietnam War. As a result of no longer possessing the card, the Bridgeport draft board scrapped his student deferment and told him to report for service. Margolis and lawyer Larry Weisman took the case to the U. S. Supreme Court, which ruled in Breen's favor.

"The lawyers who have been partners here have all been highly skilled and highly principled," said Kweskin, 69, who joined the firm in 1973. "This has created not only a good feeling for the clients but created good feelings for the lawyers in the firm, practicing a one-for-all mentality."

"It's never been about one person," he said, "it has always been about the communal effort."

Another Stamford law firm, Curtis Brinkerhoff and Barrett, claims to be the oldest in Fairfield County at 145 years old.

Gov. Dannel Malloy and Stamford Mayor David Martin recognized the Wofsey firm's storied anniversary last month by proclaiming Nov. 9 as "Wofsey, Rosen, Kweskin and Kuriansky Day" throughout the city and state.

With nearly 40 years at the firm, attorney Marshall Goldberg said the recipe for success was simple, yet difficult to replicate.

"We are very dedicated to hiring only the best attorneys and from that pool, making only the best of them partners," Goldberg said.

"It is unique in a climate where lawyers have very little loyalty, except to themselves, and will pack their bags in a moment's notice," he added.

At Wofsey, Goldberg says there is a true partnership where everything is shared equally, unlike the usual law firm practice of compensating attorneys based on what clients they bring to the table.

The firm's areas of expertise include corporate, employment, real estate, personal injury, medical malpractice and family law,

"We don't look at who brings in what, rather we share equally," Goldberg said. "There is a joint effort to make the firm better and more secure."

In the the firm's history, he noted, only one partner has ever opted to leave, but returned six months later and asked to return to the fold. He wasn't allowed, Goldberg said. As times have changed in Stamford, the firm has changed with them. Before and after the turn of the last century, the city was home to the inventor of the electric shaver and the portable typewriter, and the manufacturing base for Phillips Milk of Magnesia and Clairol. In the latter part of the past century, Stamford moved away from manufacturing and became the home of many corporations.

Goldberg said employment law barely existed when he started at the firm, and now protecting the employee rights is an important part of the business.

Steven Frederick said, who became a partner at the firm in 1998, said every attorney there tries to preserve Wofsey's heritage. "We are family oriented and try to have folks balance family and work," he said.

Frederick, 51, who began his law career on Wall Street, was looking for a different type of law practice decades ago and heard about Wofsey through friends. "I fell in love with the place," he said, adding that he will begin his 25th year at Wofsey in February.

"I think it is the people," he said. "The hiring has been terrific. It is a very selective place and searches for people who are really committed to the practice of law and the firm and attorneys are committed to causes. That is why this place has succeeded."

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