

No Profession Like the Legal Profession

Multitalented Ed Pappas can do it all

By Naseem Stecker

Prologue

Lawyer Ronnie: Have you met Ed, the 74th president of the State Bar of Michigan?

Lawyer Charlie: Ed who?

Lawyer Ronnie: Ed Pappas. The last name sounds a little foreign, and it is. Pappas is a common Greek name and it's been shortened from Papadopoulos or something like it.

Lawyer Charlie: It's all Greek to me!

Lawyer Ronnie: Actually, Ed has a Greek and Jewish heritage. In fact, it's very likely that he's only the second Jewish president that the SBM has had in its 74-year history, and only the first elected to a full term.

Lawyer Charlie: No kidding! What other claim to fame does he have?

Lawyer Ronnie: Well, he's a master of...ceremonies and a hard act to follow. Whether it's Las Vegas Night with six-foot showgirls or making a pitch for public defense services, Ed is the man. He's smooth, witty, entertaining, he can sing, compose songs, and do stand-up comedy. He doesn't look like an athlete, but he also likes to remind people that many moons ago—perhaps in his fantasy—he was the table tennis champion of the Upper Peninsula.

Lawyer Charlie: Isn't he a big-firm lawyer? Dickinson Wright?

Lawyer Ronnie: Yeah, and that too. Been there 35 years! And it was his first full-time job out of law school. That's pretty rare these days.

Lawyer Charlie: I hear he's written a book on tarts...I mean torts, you know as derived from the Latin to mean "conduct which is twisted or crooked, not straight."

Lawyer Ronnie: He specializes in business torts—not the personal injury stuff. Business disputes, that's his thing. He likes solving problems.

Lawyer Charlie: Every lawyer worth his salt does.

Lawyer Ronnie: Ed is saltier than most!

He can reel off one-liners so spontaneously—one can almost see his name in bright lights, and a second career, if he ever wants one, on stage or screen! Ed Pappas's quick wit, sharp intellect, and infectious sense of humor have captivated and endeared many who've met him. You know you'll get some good laughs when you talk to the 74th president of the State Bar of Michigan. "Anybody who says they've won every case they handled, probably has handled only one or two cases!" he quips. Pappas often jokes about himself as well, but knows the boundaries. "You have to take what you're doing seriously, and you have to take the issues seriously, but you cannot take yourself so seriously, and maybe that's why I like humor. At the right time, even in a serious situation, humor can help relieve anxiety and pain. It's a great thing for people to be able to laugh together."

Laughter was always present in the tightly knit Greek-Jewish family of his youth. But expectations were also very high for the three Pappas sons. Ed learned early how to be competitive but not confrontational—strong assets for any lawyer, though he had no such intentions or inkling at the time. His father had many different jobs when the boys were growing up, including one as a mail carrier when Ed was born. Dad was a nontraditional student who rose to become the president of Mott Community College in Flint, Michigan. The family moved several times, residing in places like Midland, Waterford Township, and Marquette, where Ed graduated from high school in 1965.

He is passionate about civility and professionalism and says that it is a misconception among some lawyers that they have to be the toughest, meanest person to get results.

As a boy, Ed nurtured hopes of becoming a veterinarian, but it turned out that he was allergic to dogs, and he abandoned that idea. Eventually, he found his stride in business school at the University of Michigan, graduating in 1969. It was also at this time that he met Laurie, his wife of 36 years. In fact, their first date was on the day that he graduated. Although he had been accepted into the MBA program at the U of M, Ed also decided to take the law boards, did really well, and was accepted into the University of Michigan Law School. “Law was not something that I had thought about doing until right before I got admitted.” But his choice was the right one. His intellect and temperament were perfectly suited for the trials and tribulations to come. Ed has been practicing law for over three decades with the same law firm—Dickinson Wright PLLC—and has distinguished himself as an expert in commercial litigation, business torts, mediation, and arbitration, with a reputation for excel-

lence and success. He likes to win and often does.

Those who have worked with him (see sidebar) know that he likes to motivate and empower people and to give them responsibilities. He’s also very even-tempered and courteous in the way that he treats everyone—witnesses, opposing counsel, and clients. He is passionate about civility and professionalism and says that it is a misconception among some lawyers that they have to be the toughest, meanest person to get results. “You are hurting your client and your own reputation and integrity when you act in that way—especially in a deposition, in court, or in front of a jury; people see that. The extremely successful lawyers are strong advocates, but they’re all very courteous and professional people. They don’t beat up on someone just for the sake of it. There’s not one top lawyer I know who does that.”

Pappas is a firm believer in education for new and seasoned lawyers and the general

public. “No matter what anybody says, we still have the best justice system in the world and a method for resolving disputes. The public deserves and needs to know how our justice system works and how it can benefit them, and why it’s so important to our society and to the three branches of government.” He plans on getting some new initiatives going in this area and to continue to press for more involvement from lawyers in terms of time and money to ensure that people who need legal help can get it. At his firm, all the partners will be making mandatory monetary contributions to the State Bar Access to Justice Fund.

“I don’t think people understand how rewarding it is to get involved. You don’t do it just to network and get business, although that is a by-product of what we do. But the rewards themselves, the ability to help change things no matter how slowly or quickly—you can’t achieve that by criticizing from the outside. If you actually come in and get involved, you can do something of value for yourself and the profession.”

Like many attorneys, Pappas is keenly aware of the serious challenges that the profession faces—an economically strapped Michigan and a globalized marketplace all portend more changes to come. There’s no question in his mind that it’s much harder to make it as a solo practitioner. “I see over the next two years real difficulties for Michigan lawyers, but I believe we’ll be able to pull out of it. This is one of the issues I want to study more carefully and to see what the SBM can do more specifically. We need to work more closely with local bar associations and other organizations to help lawyers in their practices and help them compete. We need to help each other in some pretty tough times.”



The Pappas family, left to right: Steven, Greg, Ed, Laurie, and Osnat (Greg’s wife).

Issues that relate to diversity in Bar leadership are also high on his list of priorities. “Our problems can’t be solved unless we have a diverse leadership with all of us putting in our two cents from different viewpoints. We can then analyze those issues and come up with some good solutions.” This logical organized approach is a Pappas hallmark. He prioritizes carefully and diligently calendars events and dates as soon as he is informed. This has allowed him to get involved in myriad activities. He has served on many boards and committees, including president of the Oakland County Bar Association (1997–1998); master of the Oakland County Bar Inn of Court (1998–2004); chairperson, Michigan Attorney Discipline Board hearing panel (1987–present); and president of Oakland Livingston Legal Aid (1985–1987). He has been a trustee for the Oakland Mediation Center and Oakland Community College and also held various leadership positions in the Village of Franklin where he lives.

In spite of these involvements, including serving at the State Bar in various capacities for the past 10 years, Pappas has been able to devote time to his family and is considered “the best dad in the world.” And if his beloved Maltese dog, Zeke, could speak, he would say the same! When his two sons, Greg and Steven, were in high school playing baseball, Ed did not miss a single game. He juggled his schedules and would often go back to the office to finish his work after the game was over. He also became the public announcer for the teams. “I knew every kid on the team and it was a lot of fun. I do the same thing with the Bar activities because I enjoy it.”

We all know the extroverted showman Ed, but he’s also a very private man. “He’s very modest, very private, and the noblest person I know,” says Laurie Pappas. “He works constantly, and is very dedicated to his family and community. He has more certificates than anyone!” Laurie, who is a spiritual counselor, is the more serious one of the pair. “We’re different, but we teach each other. She’s taught me a lot from her standpoint and I’ve taught her from mine,” Ed maintains. “We have the same moral compass.”

As Ed ascends the “throne”—that must be how he’s seeing this—and takes on the responsibilities of Bar president, leading 40,000 members into the brave new world, expect excellence, discussion, solutions, laughter, camaraderie, and a way of doing business that will surely make no profession like the legal profession. ■

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Ed and his beloved dog, Zeke

Pappasrazzi Findings:

Ed is passionate about his family, friends, and colleagues. Ed will do anything for someone he cares about, even when it means personal sacrifice. He is one of the funniest people I know, with a sharp wit and great sense of humor. Professionally, Ed exemplifies the best in our profession. Not only is he an excellent lawyer, but he believes that the legal profession demands the best from each of us. His legal skills, including strategic thinking, writing, and oral advocacy, are unparalleled. Ed possesses other qualities that truly distinguish him and make him respected, trusted, and admired. Ed believes in inclusion, fairness, and equality for all. His partners have recognized these traits, consistently electing him to the firm’s governing board and appointing him to a variety of administrative and management positions at the firm. Ed has also served as a mentor and confidant for many within the firm because people respect his insight, judgment, and discretion.

Kathleen A. Lang
Dickinson Wright PLLC

I have known Ed for about 30 years in various capacities—a lawyer, a professional active in the affairs of the Bar, and an advocate who has tried cases before me. He is clearly a man of integrity, a scholar in the law. He is always prepared and articulates well before the court. He also has the sense that the lawyer as an officer of the court respects the court and the other side. He shows civility and is a role model in that theater. As president of the Oakland Bar, he was very active, enthusiastic, and effective.

Hon. Fred M. Mester
6th Circuit Court, Pontiac

He’s a bit of an entertainer...he loves Broadway and musical theater. He’s very modest, very private, and the noblest person I know. He works constantly, and is very dedicated to his family and community. He has more certificates than anyone! He’s very competitive, very witty, very funny. When you get with the Pappas clan, you’re in for laughs!

Laurie Pappas