

BRUCE COURTADE—Chairperson, Representative Assembly, 2000–2001

By Jenny DeLessio, wife of Bruce Courtade

Many who know me well will expect my usual sarcastic, silly and otherwise fustian twaddle. But as I sat down to examine my thoughts about my husband's impending chairmanship of the Representative Assembly, I was surprised at my feelings of respect and pride. After all, this was the same guy that used my marinating brush to paint the porch.

I know it is customary to laud the new chairperson's many accomplishments and demonstrated leadership qualities. But Bruce's résumé has gotten so long with all of his honors, associations, committees, and publications that I joke it's the inspiration for kindling. So I'll just hit a few of the wave caps:

Bruce was recently selected as a Fellow of the Bar Foundation, one of a small percentage of attorneys recognized for their service to the profession and their communities. For Bruce, community service is not a political platform but a moral compulsion. I think he got that compulsion from his father, a former editor at the *Detroit News* who was a tireless consumer advocate and columnist. However, I think he is particularly proud of receiving the John W. Cumiskey Award in 1991. Bruce not only has great respect for Mr. Cumiskey's servant leadership, but he was humbled that his own efforts inspired hundreds of attorneys to volunteer their services.

It all started when Bruce donated his legal services to the local National Guard recruiting office to help out the families of those called to active duty in Operation Desert Storm. The news spread and he found himself coordinating over 350 local attorneys who ultimately assisted over 50 families with wills, powers of attorney, and housing and credit issues. Bruce definitely believes in the power of one—the ability of each of us to make a difference.

Bruce's latest passion is running the Access to Justice Campaign for a seven-county region. He's quick to explain that 1.6

million people in Michigan fall within the guidelines to qualify for legal aid, but because of substantial funding cuts over the years, there is a huge unmet need for the poor to even have access to the civil courts. He knows that if you're going to be a witness to justice, you don't want to be standing there alone. So he's working with others to reach out to attorneys, judges, corporations, and foundations to set up an endowment to bring the hope for justice to those who need it.

My way of dealing with my discomfort within the legal profession was to leave it. But Bruce remains as committed as ever to enhancing the lawyer's role in society. He truly wants the legal system to support those it intends to serve. So he builds—idea after idea, project after project, Bar committee after Bar committee—from a seemingly never-ending wellspring of insights into what the important issues are and how to take the crucial first step toward solutions. But most people (and many lawyers) are more comfortable with old problems than with new solutions.

Bruce has said, "People who stay in the middle of the road get run over." This isn't always the popular course in a profession that relies on precedent to recommend action, typically perpetuating a variation of some proven approach rather than forging new ground. Bruce pushes the envelope, and that is precisely

why he will be successful in leading the Representative Assembly. He strives to build links between disparate viewpoints and interests, in search not of the "split-the-difference" compromise, but the truly creative solution.

Don't get me wrong. Bruce is no saint. He's a charming, complex, thoughtful, and sometimes infuriating real person. As with anyone pursuing important ideas with human energies, he might even need some cleaning up after now and then. But rest assured, wherever legal practice is headed, Bruce is sure to be in the middle of the action. The future of the Bar belongs



Bruce Courtade and family

to people like Bruce who give freely of their time and energy, people who see the possibilities before they become obvious.

Now I'll share the really important things about Bruce that you won't find on his résumé and that only his wife would know: He shouts out answers to "Jeopardy" from his LazyBoy ("Alex, I'll take Feisty Felines for \$1000!"); he didn't say a word when the mail carrier developed a hernia last year delivering the MasterCard bill after Christmas; and I fear that his new computer has more RAM than Microsoft headquarters. He's the highly esteemed champion thumb-wrestler of our household, our daughter's favorite partner in Crazy 8's, and the world's best dad in a homemade card. So you see, above all that he has accomplished professionally, Bruce is the father of my daughter and my very dear friend. ♦

Jenny DeLessio is vice president of human resources at the National Heritage Academies.

By Jeff Minore

Bruce Courtade is my friend. But do not think that because I consider Bruce my friend, that he is safe from criticism. After all, he is a University of Michigan man. His politics land on the wrong side of the aisle, and he drives a car with those funny blue headlights. So trust me when I say that Bruce is going to be an excellent chairperson of the Representative Assembly.

Bruce is qualified well beyond his legal expertise. He is a fantastic attorney and has been honored with the Cummsiskey Award, although that says as much about character as ability. He has also been recognized as one of the Top 40 Under 40 by the *Grand Rapids Business Journal*. His Bar admissions and professional associations are too lengthy to list. (Whatever happened to the one page résumé?)

But the real reasons Bruce will be a great chairperson have to do with honor, commitment, dedication, and plain old hard work. These are characteristics Bruce exemplifies. His friends can count on him no matter what the situation and no matter how much he has done already. I see the same dedication to his family, to his church, to his clients, and to the Bar association.

Bruce is there when a charity needs help (AIDS Resource Center Board of Directors). He is there when his alma mater needs help (University of Michigan Club, University of Michigan Law School Fund, and the University of Michigan Grand Rapids Scholarship Fund). He is there when his profession needs help (several Bar committees and memberships), and he

is there when friends and family need him. No one I know does more with each 24 hours.

No one I know is more grounded regarding the priorities in his life. Ask Bruce and he will tell you that he is not able to spend as much time as he wants with family and friends, but who can say they meet that test? I watch him with his daughter, and I know of no father who could be more loving or devoted. He is a tireless advocate for many local causes. He works long hours and travels extensively for both clients and Bar work. In short, Bruce has a passion for and a belief in those people and causes for which he works. Once he makes a commitment, you can have no better advocate or confidant, inside or outside of the courtroom.

I am, at the same time, excited for Bruce and regretting the new responsibilities he will assume. The Bar will prosper, our friendship will prosper, but I will have to make do with a little less of him than I would like. The Representative Assembly is lucky to have such a committed and honorable chairperson. ♦

Jeff Minore has worked for the Michigan Senate for 12 years and is currently legislative aide for State Senator Bob Emerson.

By Arthur B. DeBruyn

Bruce Courtade is one of the most "connected" people I know. He is one of those people who could travel to the remotest location in the world and then bump into someone he knows. I like to joke that there are only two degrees of separation between me and anyone else in the world simply because I have the privilege of calling Bruce my friend.

It is well documented that Bruce has a penchant for getting involved. But the larger question is why? Having known Bruce before either one of us became attorneys, I know that most days he would much rather be at home in his basement pursuing one of his woodworking projects, playing with his daughter Jessie, or just reading a good book. In this day where time is our most valuable commodity, what motivates Bruce continually to sacrifice his on our behalf?

I suspect part of the answer to this question stems from his upbringing. Despite being younger than me, Bruce is what I call "old school," a blue collar Detroit catholic. As an editor/columnist with one of the Detroit papers, his father's job was to help out the "little guy" having trouble with any number of large, impersonal institutions. In similar fashion, Bruce has

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championed the cause of those less fortunate in our world. In a way, he has continued his father's work, for example, by taking on *pro bono* work to the point where he was recognized with the Cumiskey award in 1991. He also devoted time to the Grand Rapids AIDS Resource Center long before that cause became popular, let alone acceptable. But more important, you must know that Bruce's parents inscribed him with a strong sense of loyalty, duty, integrity, and morality, attributes that are increasingly swept aside in our modern society. Those characteristics are at the very foundation of his identity.

I am convinced that Bruce finds himself leading the Representative Assembly simply because of who he is. The old cliché that some people seek greatness while others have it thrust upon them applies here, with Bruce falling into the latter category. He naturally exudes leadership without consciously seeking it. At the same time, when the need for leadership does fall onto his shoulders, Bruce does not shy away from the duty, no matter what the burden. Having served under Bruce's leadership on a couple of different occasions, I can tell you what makes him such a good leader. He has an intuitive sensitivity

to others. He possesses a great sense of humor and knows how to keep things "light," but at the same time keeping focused on the task at hand. He possesses an instinct of timing and balance in the group setting, knowing when to take charge and direct and when to sit back and let others lead. He can find and maintain the focus of the group without being overbearing. He is honest, but discreet. Through it all, I have yet to witness an occasion where he has ever abandoned his principles. He never forgets who he is or where he came from.

So why is Bruce doing this on our behalf? Why is he donating his valuable time to lead the Representative Assembly? I believe it is simply because he is born to the position of leadership. Not because he wants it. Not because he needs it. Truthfully, we need him a whole lot more than he needs us. But fortunately for all the members of the State Bar of Michigan, he is willing to assume the mantle of leadership, and our organization is far better for it. ♦

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