

# PRACTICE MAKES PERFECT

After 50-plus years on the job, Dickie McCamey's trio of senior attorneys don't dare utter the "R" word

By Daniel Casciato

Photos by Richard Kelly

Next to the love of his family, Dave Armstrong has enjoyed being a lawyer more than anything else in his life. So much so that at the age of 76, Armstrong continues to practice full-time at the downtown Pittsburgh law offices of Dickie, McCamey & Chilcote.

"I just enjoy it so much," Armstrong says when asked why he still works when he could have retired a decade ago. "I've enjoyed representing clients in litigation matters. I'd hate to stop doing

what I enjoyed doing so much. It's that simple."

Even more remarkable is the fact that Armstrong has been with Dickie McCamey his entire career. He'll celebrate his 51st year with the firm this month.

"Representing clients is an important matter," he says. "I'm part of one of the three branches of government, the judicial system, in the greatest democracy that ever existed in the world. I'm an officer of that system and honored to be part of it."

Armstrong has close company in his longevity. Dickie McCamey has two other senior attorneys, Ted Struk and Dave Fawcett, who skipped retirement and have been practicing law for over 50 years.

Fawcett started practicing in 1953 and also has been with Dickie McCamey his entire career, except for a brief stint (1969-1970) as a judge in Allegheny County. Struk received his law degree

in 1957 and joined the firm in 1962 after clerking for a federal district court judge.

Like Armstrong, Struk and Fawcett can't imagine doing anything else at this stage in their lives.

"I enjoy every day I come into the office and working with all of the nice men and women we have here," Fawcett says. "I'm proud that I'm still able to work and my wife likes me to work. She encourages me."

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Struk says he still practices for the satisfaction of being a lawyer, and it has nothing to do with compensation. “People come to you with problems that they can’t solve, and you try as best you can to help them,” he says. “When you’re successful in helping them, it’s a wonderful feeling. This career has everything to do with the feeling of self-worth that you get after you have done something for somebody. That type of feeling is something you can never buy.”

Armstrong graduated from the University of Pittsburgh in 1952 and received his law degree

from Duquesne University in 1956. His career began as a personal injury defense lawyer and later expanded to include many other areas of litigation. At one point more than 30 years ago, he served as national counsel to Westinghouse Electric Corporation in the electrical equipment antitrust cases.

Armstrong has represented other major corporations and prominent individuals in large and complex litigation, including antitrust, securities, class actions, shareholder derivative actions, and personal injury suits. He has

represented CEOs and board members of major corporations like Gulf Oil Corporation, Firestone Tire & Rubber Company, and PPG Industries, Inc.

“I have represented parties who had engaged in very serious matters, from personal injury to white collar crimes, that would send people to prison,” he says. “The trial lawyer is the ultimate consummate winner or loser in a very important matter in a very important system.”

Armstrong proudly notes that he has been named in every edition of “The Best Lawyers in America” and is the only Pennsylvania lawyer to be named in four different categories: business litigation, personal injury litigation, criminal defense, and bet your company litigation.

“Dave Fawcett often jokes that he hired me, but Dave Armstrong stole me for awhile,” says Jim Miller, the firm’s president and CEO. Working closely with Armstrong, Fawcett and Struk as a young lawyer “was a tremendous experience for me because I got to see the three greatest trial lawyers, not only here, but as good as I have ever seen around the country,” Miller says. “It enabled me to take different aspects of how they each approached cases. I took something from each of them that suited me and fit my style. I feel that I greatly benefited and it was a great gift for me to work with such great trial lawyers.”

Fawcett’s practice has covered a wide array of commercial litigation matters. He majored in commerce and finance at Bucknell University and received his J.D. from Pitt. He served as president of the Allegheny County Bar Association in 1965 and was part of the committee that hired the association’s first executive director. “We knew that to grow the association we needed to hire an executive director,” he says. “Since that time, the (ACBA) has grown to become one of the largest and best bar associations in the country.”

Fawcett also served as the president of the Pennsylvania Bar Association from 1980-1981, and for 10 years he was the only local bar association member to serve as a member of the American Bar Association’s House of Delegates.

Like Armstrong, Fawcett also has been listed in each edition of “The Best Lawyers in America” in the categories of business litigation, personal injury litigation, and bet your company litigation.

Fawcett also maintained strong ties with his

law school. He formerly taught trial tactics at Pitt, was president of the Law Alumni Association, received the law school’s Distinguished Alumni Award, and is a member of the university’s Board of Trustees.

Whether he was teaching law students, dealing with clients, working with members of the bar association, or interacting with opposing counsel, Fawcett says he hopes he made a positive impact on others. “Hopefully, I served some kind of example to those people who have been with me that you can practice law and still be courteous and considerate with other lawyers, and yet be persistent and consistent in representing your clients.”

At 75, Struk is the youngest of Dickie McCamey’s three senior attorneys. His has defended clients in cases involving, among other things, personal injuries and property damage, professional malpractice (including doctors, attorneys, and accountants), products liability, and insurance bad faith claims. Struk graduated from Pennsylvania State University and received his law degree from the University of Pennsylvania.

Dickie McCamey only had 12 attorneys when Struk joined the firm. Today, it has over 130 attorneys and nine offices in seven states.

“I have great pride in this firm,” Struk says. “This firm and the people who work here, and who have come through here, have always been important to me. When I started, I met a group of wonderful human beings who were really generous to me and gave me an opportunity to build a career when I had no ability and no experience at the time.”

Alan Torrance, who has been with the firm for 22 years, admires his colleagues’ commitment to the legal profession. “What these guys bring, and what they have brought over my years here, is leadership by example,” Torrance says. “They do things the right way. And they work so that the law is followed and that there is fairness, not only with their own client, but also with opposing counsel, with the court, and with people they work with here at the office. They are very candid, straightforward and fair. You can’t help but be influenced and learn by it.”

Torrance plans to follow in their footsteps. “I have no plans to retire,” he says. “It’s a win-win

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the legal community. They work full-time and work like they did 20 years ago. They handle cases, go to court and meet with their clients. They're fully functioning practitioners. They don't go in and take up space in a law firm and read a newspaper.”

“They are three of the greatest guys that you'd ever want to meet,” Ward adds. “Not only are they stellar lawyers, but they maintain an ability to be gentlemen by the way they do it. They are consummate gentlemen in the way that they practice law and the way that they conduct their lives.”

During their storied tenures, Armstrong, Fawcett, and Struk have seen a great deal of change in the legal profession. “You can't survive that long without being able to adapt to change,” Torrance says. “I've seen a lot of changes since I have been here and how each day is different now than it was 20 years ago. These guys have been willing and able to adapt.”

Changes in the way lawyers communicate have drastically altered the legal scene since they came on board. “Computers especially brought a change in communications,” Fawcett says. “Email brought along instant communication. In the olden days, you'd get a letter from a client and have time to respond. But now you have to respond immediately. It's a much faster world, in a way.”

One positive change Fawcett witnessed has been the increasing role of women in the profession. “When I started there were few women lawyers,” he recalls. “Now, some of the outstanding lawyers, certainly here and throughout the country, are women. I think that has helped to improve our profession tremendously.”

Fawcett also has seen law firms attempt to diversify their ranks. “Over the years, many diversity attempts were being made and we're gradually gaining on that,” he says. “I'm hopeful that continues and I am certain that it will.”

Fawcett does lament one change he's seen over

situation for the individual and the law firm. A few years ago, some firms were forcing their senior people out of the door, but we have never done that here. It seems like the pendulum is swinging back and firms are no longer forcing their senior lawyers out because they realized their mistake.”

Christine Ward spent 17 years with Dickie McCamey before she was elected judge in Allegheny County in 2003. She says the three senior attorneys still practice at a high level. “I have a great deal of personal affection for all three of them. They are very well respected in



the last 20 years: the declining number of cases going to trial. “Today, there's more emphasis on settlement and alternate dispute resolution because of the expense of pursuing a case and defending a case,” he says. “There's now a great emphasis for resolving cases earlier. That's a good thing, but it also restricts the opportunities for young lawyers to learn the way we did, trying one case after another.”

Armstrong agrees. “Litigation becomes more complicated, time consuming and expensive every year and with every rule change,” he says. “We have fewer cases going to trial all the time because it's to the point where you have to be a wealthy person to be involved in simple litigation.”

The size of law firms has also changed significantly. When Struk first started to practice there was a group of lawyers who represented plaintiffs and a group representing defendants. “Those groups knew one another well and we all practiced here in Allegheny County,” Struk says. “There was camaraderie and respect even though we were opponents and tried these cases seriously and fought them furiously. Gradually, a number of firms from out of the county started

to come into Allegheny County to set up offices. With that development, correspondingly, our office started to move into other areas as well.”

As they look to the future, the senior attorneys know the time will come when they will have to ease their workload. But they don't dare utter the “R” word.

“When you get to be my age, you start to be concerned about your health,” Struk says. “I don't know how much longer I will be practicing. This is a partnership with my wife, Mary, and so, I'm just taking it on a year-to-year basis for me on how I'm doing, and how we're both getting along healthwise.”

Armstrong also hopes his health permits him to stay on for a few more years. “I don't know how much longer I'll be here,” he says. “I'm nearing the end, but there aren't any dates set.”

As long as he has the energy, expect to see Fawcett come to the office every day. “I'd like to work as long as I can continue to do this on a full-time basis, and as long as I have the ability to handle my other matters that are assigned to me,” Fawcett says. “I think working is good for your mind and your attitude. It keeps you active and healthy.”

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Theodore O. Struk