

## UNDERSTANDING OUR CHANGING COMMUNITY

with

## CHARLES (CHUCK) MEYER

*As explained by Bill Santen in the July issue of the CBA Report, the Senior Lawyers Division will be publishing a series of articles, each written by a veteran lawyer, seeking to reveal who the author really is, what s/he really wants in life, and how we are going to achieve an even better community.*



My mother used to say: “You have a good future behind you.” This was true because I was born into a family with two loving and supportive parents. I now realize what a great advantage that gave me in life.

My father and grandfather worked together as home builders on the West Side of Cincinnati. Dad worked hard six days a week. I remember him coming home with

sweat-drenched work clothes and boots caked with mud and concrete. My mother helped in the business while raising four children. Their work ethic seeped into me. At age 15, I was selling the *Enquirer* at night games at Crosley Field. At 16, I drove a newspaper route stuffing racks at night in OTR. Through high school, college, and law school, I had about 20 different jobs. I’ve worked hard my entire life. Whether it’s practicing law or doing manual labor, work is fulfilling to me. I am happy when I am busy and being productive. My son Evan and I are fixing up an old house where he will live, and I enjoy it.

Growing up in a blue-collar Catholic environment gave me a strong foundation albeit a somewhat narrow view of the world. From an early age I wanted to learn more. I read avidly. I began hitchhiking in high school and hitchhiked more than 5,000 miles in two to three years, including a trip to California when I was 18. I attended Boston College, majored in English, but took philosophy, psychology, sociology, theology, economics, history, and other courses that I thought would help answer the questions of *Who are we?* and *Why are we here?* After attending Boston College Law School, I returned to Cincinnati and have practiced law with Santen & Hughes since 1981. I am the president and a managing partner of Santen & Hughes, a great firm with great people. While this provides stability in my career, I continue to try to learn more about life and, in so doing, have ventured into new encounters.

I led an early Sunday morning breakfast program for the homeless at Nast Trinity Church for eight years. It gave me insight into the lives of others. I served on the initial board of the Corporation for Findlay Market for eight years (three years as board chair) and assisted in the transition when the City turned over responsibilities for running the market. I met my wife Leila while she was living and working in Paris, and I traveled there a dozen times to woo and persuade her to join me in Cincinnati. My current walking shoes have in the last two years trekked through four continents and New Zealand, where my daughter Kate and her family live. I am blessed to also have a son Phil in Boston.

What my experience has taught me is that each of us can single-handedly make a difference. If we devote ourselves to something that we are passionate about, we can accomplish a lot. Never underestimate the power of one. If you lead by example, one often becomes many.

One significant challenge facing our society is ameliorating the differences between the “haves” and the “have nots.” I am concerned that we are creating a second class of citizens who are disenfranchised and do not feel integrated into the mainstream. This arises in part from disparities in our education system. Where a child lives and goes to school has a tremendous impact on their ability to succeed in life. And consider how homelessness affects a child’s education. We can and need to do better.

I admire people like Mary Burke Rivers, the executive director of Over-The-Rhine Community Housing, and David Singleton, executive director of the Ohio Justice and Policy Center, who make it their lifework to help those in need. But even if we cannot devote our full-time efforts to just causes, we can still have an impact on bettering our community.

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