

UNDERSTANDING OUR CHANGING COMMUNITY

with

JEFF SCHLOEMER

As explained by Bill Santen in the July 2015 issue of the CBA Report, the Senior Lawyers Division is 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.



“Leave this place better than you found it.” It’s a simple, not very poetic, phrase — kind of a golden rule. One of the things I like about it is that one of my partners has it printed in bold on a board on his office wall. It’s the sort of admonition that could serve each of us well in how we act within our

families, our offices, our communities, and our world.

I’m Jeff Schloemer, a born and raised Cincinnati who left the area for seven years for college and law school, returned, and have been happily ensconced at Taft Stettinius & Hollister for the past 30 years.

I grew up in Silverton and then Anderson Township in a family of eight kids. My parents were products of the Depression. My dad never graduated from high school, and started work early because his help was needed to support his family. He learned a trade as a machinist, moved on to work as a furniture salesman, and finally started his own retail furniture business in the late 1940s. I don’t think he ever really learned to read a financial statement, but through sheer hard work and will, he made sure that his family had a comfortable life, put his kids through college, and kept his business going for almost 50 years.

My mom was the more academically inclined one. She probably would have had different options available to her today than were open to a woman in the 1940s. Early on in the life of their business, she kept the company’s books. Their accountant would come over on Sunday evenings and my mom and he would sit at the kitchen table and take care of the books. It was a different time. Among the more abiding memories of my childhood was my mom sitting at that same kitchen table with a steady progression of her kids as they grew up, working through homework with each of them.

My first job (at probably about age 8) was spending the afternoon picking up trash from the parking lot of one of my dad’s stores. He would pay me a dollar and I’d spend it all on baseball cards. Later, on Saturdays during the school year and during summers of high school, I’d work in the furniture warehouse or act as a helper on one of the delivery trucks. That experience served me well. I can navigate the west side of Cincinnati as well as the natives.

To say the least, I was lucky. I was born into a strong family, lived in an environment where a solid work ethic was a given, and was provided with pretty much unlimited educational

opportunities. On top of that, I was lucky enough to convince a smart, hardworking, thoughtful, and independent attorney to marry me, and together we raised a smart, hardworking, thoughtful and independent daughter. Like many of us, there is no doubt that my starting line was far ahead of that for many in this community.

Forty years ago, when I was at St. Xavier High School, I tutored one afternoon a week at Washington Park Elementary. Since then, I’ve done many things near Washington Park — a generation later serving as a mentor through the Cincinnati Youth Collaborative to a student at the same Washington Park Elementary, serving Thanksgiving meals for many years at Nast-Trinity Church, tutoring at Rothenberg Elementary in Over-the-Rhine, and for several years serving on the board of the Cincinnati Symphony.

I have seen up close how Over-the-Rhine has been transformed, and it has been wonderful to behold. One of my favorite experiences was sitting in front of the Washington Park bandstand with my wife one lovely Saturday evening, along with others of all ages and backgrounds, listening to a jazz band. That, like walking through Findlay Market on a Saturday morning, showcases the best of Cincinnati.

But there is a very troubling underside to our Cincinnati story. A child-poverty rate at above 50% (and for African-American children at almost 75%) is simply unacceptable. And when studies evidence that a child who doesn’t read at “grade level” by fourth grade is likely destined never to catch up in school and four times more likely to drop out of high school, doing nothing (and hoping that things improve) really is not an option.

I do not pretend to know what the answers are, but helping one-on-one at an individual level, or dedicating yourself with passion to changing things, at least offer a start. When I interview lawyers who are just starting in their careers and are considering whether to come to Cincinnati or to take a job in New York, L.A., or Atlanta, one of the biggest selling points I very sincerely offer them is that, if they are enthusiastic, dedicated, and hardworking, they have much greater opportunities to get involved in this community and to make a difference here.

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