

Practice Profile

Passing the torch

Maddin Hauser shareholder named president

By Carol Lundberg

In 1983, Steven D. Sallen, then a second-year student at University of Detroit Law School, saw a 3-by-5 index card tacked to the university placement office's corkboard. It said that Maddin, Weiner, Hauser, Wartell & Roth was looking for its very first summer associate.

Sallen interviewed, and spent his second summer at the firm. Then, after graduating and passing the bar exam, he was hired as an associate.

And he's been there ever since.

On Jan. 1, the former summer associate Sallen was named president of Maddin, Hauser, Wartell, Roth & Heller, P.C., taking the managerial reins from Michael W. Maddin.

It's a heck of a time to take over, Maddin acknowledged.

"Last year was the toughest year we ever had as a firm," he said.

As the economy bore down on Maddin Hauser, along with many law firms in Michigan and nationwide, the firm had to cut some staff and attorneys.

"We did it for the right reasons, and in the right way, giving people time to plan, helping them and making referrals to help them find new jobs," Maddin said.

But in a business that keeps at the core of its corporate culture a family-centered philosophy and family-like work environment, it wasn't easy.

But Sallen is looking ahead, at preserving the firm's quality of service and corporate culture, and looking at how to improve the firm where he has built his career.

Back in 1984, Sallen was one of 14 lawyers. Today, he leads 47 of them. The firm's clients have always been what Sallen calls entrepreneurs, mostly small- and mid-sized business

owners. At the firm's center is real estate and business transactions, but over the years, it's also focused on defense practice and insurance, banking, estate planning, commercial litigation and environmental law.

The firm grew slowly, and never sought to increase its footprint, he said. Rather, growth has been dictated on the needs of existing clients, who at times have demanded that Maddin Hauser expand into new areas of the law.

That's what happened with Sallen, whose focus for most of his career has been on real estate and business transactions. But in 1986, an existing client needed a lawyer to work on a case that pushed Sallen into environmental law.

"The way it works in the practice of law, once you touch a subject or touch a file, you own it for life," he explained. "Then, the next time someone needs work done in that area, they come back to you. That's how subject

matter is mastered, and that's how lawyers are made."

Though the firm has no plans to branch off into new practice areas now, he added that it's possible, depending on client needs.

His focus, at least during his first year, is to preserve what's good about the firm and improve those things that could be a little better.

"Because of the way our firm has grown, it's an atmosphere that's safe," he said. "I want every attorney, every secretary, ever paralegal to come to work and feel like it's a safe place where people are treated fairly, hard work is rewarded, and family commitments are understood."

He added, "I want everyone's experience to be uniform. Our culture sounds too good to be true, and sometimes it is. But I would like to even out the bumps and for everyone to care as much as I do, and to know how much I care."

It'll be a tough job for Sallen, not that he's uncomfortable being the firm's cheerleader; he's not. It's just that he notes, "I'm also a lawyer, and I have clients and hours to bill, on top of managing the firm. I work on the firm and work on the firm's issues when other people are going home."

Though Maddin is happy to hand over those responsibilities to Sallen, Maddin also made it clear he has no plans to retire. He's nearly 70 years old, and wants to continue representing clients and serving on the firm's executive committee.

"But there is a realization in everyone's life, when you know it's time to plan for what is next," Maddin said. "I love the firm, and I just knew that at some point you have to push to make this happen."

If you would like to comment on this story, please contact Carol Lundberg at (248) 865-3105 or carol.lundberg@mi.lawyersweekly.com.



Steven D. Sallen, left, new president of Maddin, Hauser, Wartell, Roth & Heller P.C., consults with Michael W. Maddin, who will continue to work at the Southfield-based firm, but will no longer manage it.