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Q&A > department

Michael P. Schostok

Age: 49

Family: His wife, Mary, is an appellate court justice on the 2nd District Appellate Court. They have three children, Marisa, 22, Gina, 20, and Michael, 16.

Education: He earned his undergraduate degree from Miami University in Oxford, Ohio, in 1983 and his law degree from Capital University Law School in Columbus, Ohio, in 1986.

Profession: An equity partner at Salvi, Schostok & Pritchard, he concentrates his practice on medical malpractice, personal injury and wrongful death. His legal career includes winning three record-breaking settlements in three jurisdictions. To date, he has won over \$142 million in settlements on behalf of his clients. He is a past president of the Illinois Trial Lawyers Association.

1. Why did you become a lawyer?

I had a lot of influence by my dad, who was a lawyer, and from my earliest memory that's kind of what I wanted to do. Even in high school I geared myself toward college and then law school. I was one of the fortunate people who knew what they wanted to do and was able to achieve that goal.

2. What's the last big case or matter that you handled, and what did it entail?

The last big case was a case I settled about two months ago. It was a \$12 million settlement against a hospital in Rockford. I represented a fellow who had a skydiving accident, and he had a fractured neck but was stable and not paralyzed. He became paralyzed four days after he was admitted due to what we alleged

was negligent conduct by various doctors and nurses. I think that matched the highest recorded settlement in Winnebago County.

3. What's the strangest thing that happened to you as a lawyer?

I had a case set for trial back in the mid-'90s — it was a medical malpractice case. And the lawyer representing the defendant physician begged the court for a continuance days before the case was to start. The judge denied the continuance and the lawyer told me that his client was either going to sue him or fire him because the defendant doctor did not know that the case had been set for trial. After motions in limine we were going to pick the jury the next day and the defense lawyer fell down the stairs the morning of jury selection, hit his head and had to be admitted to the hospital, so the case had to be continued. He's a fine gentleman so I don't think this was in any way staged, it's just interesting ...

4. If you could have lunch with anyone, living or dead, who would it be and why?

Thomas Jefferson.

Not only was he a lawyer, but he was a very big advocate of the jury trial system — so much so that he was instrumental in having the Seventh Amendment of our Constitution, which guaranteed the right of a civil jury trial. He truly believed that it was one of the ways that the common man could level the playing field against the very wealthy and the very powerful. That is a principle that stands true today. He also was very interesting in a lot of other ways and doesn't get a lot of credit, for instance, for commissioning the corps of discovery, Lewis and Clark, who explored the great unknown, the American West. It is today's equivalent of having a manned spacecraft go and explore Mars and come back ...

5. What advice do you have for new or future lawyers?

... No. 1 would be, work very hard. It seems like there is a trend where young lawyers coming out of law school are either not willing or often don't work six days a week, for instance, routinely. That's something that I had to do and most lawyers who started practicing 20 or 30 years ago pretty much did routinely.

If you want to be a trial lawyer you have to try cases and it's becoming very difficult to always

get out to trial, especially for young lawyers. You've got to force yourself to do it, whether it's taking a very difficult case to win, whether it's partnering up with a more senior lawyer as second or third chair, you have to get out to trial because you can't become an accomplished trial lawyer without practicing the craft — no matter how talented you are.

6. What do you like the most and the least about being a lawyer?

I like pretty much everything about being a lawyer. It has been intellectually, spiritually and financially rewarding for me. It has been everything I could ever hope it to be and more. ...

The thing I like least about being a lawyer is constantly having to defend my practice. I defend it in the public. I defend it financially because I know it to be a very noble, honorable thing. It's disturbing to me that it's constantly under attack from a variety of individuals and entities who want to diminish the practice and specifically what I do for living. ...

7. If you didn't become a lawyer, what career would you have chosen?

I would have taught history. I almost did. When I applied to law school I got into Capital University Law School in Columbus, Ohio, but I really wanted to go to law school in Chicago. I almost chose going into teaching as opposed to going back out to Ohio. But I decided to pursue my dream of becoming a lawyer ... I went to Capital and it turned out to be great for me. Not only did I go to law school but I met my wife while in law school.

8. What's your favorite childhood vacation?

My favorite childhood vacation was going to visit Gettysburg and Washington, D.C., when I was about 8 years old. I still remember it to this day. That was really the eye-opening experience for me that sparked my love of history, which I majored in in college and specialized in American History. ...

9. What's your favorite Chicago restaurant?

One of my favorites is Joe's Seafood Prime Steak & Stone Crab because I love seafood and I love stone crab claws. ... It's a very lively place, and from what I've read you're likely to see famous people although I've never seen anyone noteworthy. ■

By Olivia Clarke

