

Law with Heart: Giving Back at RJG

by Phoebe Sharp

The law firm of Rosenn, Jenkins and Greenwald celebrates its fiftieth anniversary this May. It is the largest and oldest law firm in NEPA. It has expanded beyond its original Wilkes-Barre location to include offices in Hazleton, Scranton and Milford. Yet, somehow, it continues to keep a firm grip on the values and ethics of its founders.

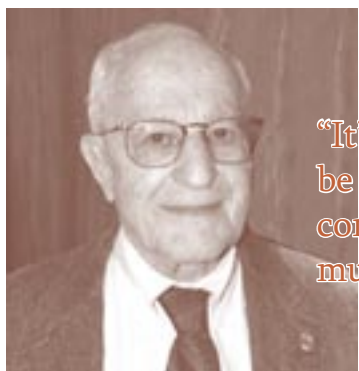
“We have a responsibility to give back to the community.”

It’s a statement—and philosophy—I was to hear over and over in interviews with the firm’s founders, partners and younger associates.

But was it just some kind of mantra instilled in the RJG corporate culture? After all, the partners are the first to admit that public visibility and service is good for business. Or is it more than that—a genuine belief that public service is a debt owed to the community in which one works and lives?

The answer is simple, and it begins with the beginning of the firm itself.

You need to go all the way back to World War II, to the



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day after Pearl Harbor—December 8, 1941. This is the day Harold Rosenn, a founding partner and now of counsel to RJG, was admitted to the bar.

“Not a very auspicious day,” he grins ruefully. “My brother, Max, had already been practicing law as a sole practitioner, and it looked like I wouldn’t be joining

him anytime soon. I went into the service and was stationed with the 8th Air Force in England, with a B-17 bomb group. Max volunteered in 1944 and went to the South Pacific as an officer with the Judge Advocate General’s office.

“I came out in 1945, and he came out in 1946. Max set up our practice on the twelfth floor of the United Penn Bank Building and formalized our partnership on July 1, 1948.

“Max was always very forward thinking, and he realized that the future trend in law would be partnership firms. There was only one other partnership firm in existence at that time—Redford, McGuigan, Waller and Jones (now defunct)—and it was really quite a novel idea. We started looking for people to join the firm. We had three qualities we were searching for in possible candidates—integrity, ability and compatibility.”

The two brothers went through a list of the 300 lawyers practicing in NEPA at that time, and picked two, Henry Greenwald and Mitchell Jenkins.

“Mitchell had come back from service with the 109th Field Artillery and had already been in Congress for a term and also an Assis-

tant DA—he had the qualities we were looking for in our new partners. Henry Greenwald was known as a lawyer’s lawyer, a real scholar,” explained Harold, “We also took our one associate, Joseph Savitz, with us, and he eventually became the firm’s first new partner after the four founders.”

So now you have what is arguably

the oldest remaining partnership firm in NEPA, a firm realizing that specialization is the trend of the future and beginning to concentrate on corporate, commercial and labor law. It’s a firm that is starting to grow rapidly. Where does the



“We owe it to society to play a role in its development...”
Judge Max Rosenn

community service factor come in?

Both Harold and Max Rosenn look almost puzzled by the question.

“It was always there,” says Harold.

“We always felt that because we lived here, we had a great responsibility to the community—we recognized that time had to be given to the community and we did that with great satisfaction and pleasure. But really, I have to say that it all came from my brother, Max. He instilled this obligation in all of us, not so much by direction, but by example. Each new associate and partner saw what he was doing in the community, and soon began to find their own niche.

“My particular favorite was the United Way. I met my wife Sally Ann there—she was working with the Girl Scouts at the time. Since the marriage turned out so well, I continue to give generously each year.”

Harold grins roguishly before turning serious again.

“It’s a matter of pride. We all take great pride in being a member of RJG, and that pride rubs off in our efforts in the community. It’s a privilege, really, to be able to give back to the community that has

given so much to us.”

This is a theme I will hear over and over.

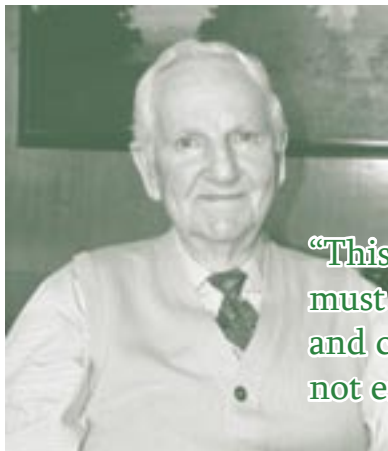
Harold’s brother Max—that’s Judge Max Rosenn of the United States Court of Appeals—picks up the thread.

“I’ve always felt that lawyers have played a dynamic role in the formation and advancement of this country. We have so much to offer—both because of our training and because of our experience—that we owe it to society to play a role in its development. I’ve always tried to play a role, and tried to influence our associates and others to do the same thing. Albert Schweitzer once said that ‘every person owes a duty to society,’ and we take that to heart here.”

When did he begin to form this idea?

“I think it really came from my mother. She always said, ‘no matter how poor you are, there is always someone who is worse off, and you need to help them.’ Giving is an integral part of Judaism, and I was raised in a family where giving was just a natural part of growing up.”

Joseph Savitz, that first RJG partner, started his civic activities before he even came to RJG—he was the first Campus Chair of



“This profession is an honorable one; you must give your clients your full attention and communicate—just doing the work is not enough.” Joseph Savitz

United Way at Wilkes University. That was just the beginning of a public service career that included being on the boards of Wilkes and numerous other local organizations, including being the national Judge Advocate for the Jewish War Veterans.

“You know, Harold and I make it a practice to take all the new associates to lunch after they’ve been here a couple of months,” he says, “We let them know that along with being proud to belong to an organization like RJG, they have an

obligation and a duty as a member of our profession to give something back. We owe it to the community here. I tell them ‘Let yourself become known by virtue of the wisdom you can impart to these organizations.’ It’s just something that we do.”

Gene Roth has been with the firm for 44 years.

He’s quick to reiterate the involvement of partners and associates from RJG in the community.

“We’ve had more chairs of United Way than any other organization, two chairs of Wilkes University, the Chamber of Commerce, almost every organization you can think of. Attainment of clients has never been the motivating force behind this involvement. It has just seemed to be a natural part of our business, starting with Max. But I think that we all have an obligation to pay back the community for what it has invested in us.”

“There are only so many positions around the table at any of the large civic organizations in town. And I’m proud to say that there has always been someone from RJG sitting there at that table.”

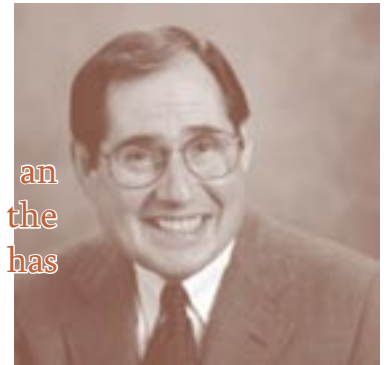
It’s a very large table. I have a twenty-page list of activities and honors undertaken and received by lawyers from RJG, none of which are mentioned or boasted

about during any of the interviews.

Murray Ufberg, the Managing Partner at RJG, is part of the “middle guard,” hired after the initial partners, but at RJG long enough to have risen to the top. He has been with the firm for 35 years, and was the tenth lawyer to be hired.

“I was initially attracted to the firm because I could specialize in civil litigation. At that time, they were the only firm in a wide radius where you could pick a specialty. Wilkes-Barre was attractive to me

because I originally came from Shenandoah and I wanted to be near family. This turned out to be a wise decision, since my two brothers and parents ended up moving to Scranton.”



“I think we all have an obligation to pay back the community for what it has invested in us.” Gene Roth

When asked about his community involvement, Ufberg smiles modestly.

“I’ve been involved in some activities in the community,” he says, listing a couple of examples. What he doesn’t say is that he’s been Chair of the Wilkes-Barre Chamber of Business and Industry, Past President of the Jewish Community Center, Chair of the Luzerne County Business Roundtable, Past President of Ohav Zedek synagogue, Past Chairman of United Way, Campaign Chair for United Way, recipient of the Jaycees Distinguished Service Award, on the Board of Directors of WVIA—and that’s just the first few listings.

Ufberg considers this as “having done no more than my share, and a share equal to that of my partners and to the effort that RJG makes in the community as a whole.”

Do the new associates today come with this ingrained attitude that giving is only right?

Ufberg considers the question.

“Of course we’re very selective in the associates we choose, so we’re able to choose people with the right outlook. But I think that anyone coming to a smaller community has a predisposition to becoming involved in community life and wanting to add something to the fabric of the community. I tell the new associates that they will have every effort to succeed, but they need to work hard and concern themselves with the people with whom they work—and with the community, which is the bigger family to which we all belong.”

Robert Schaub is currently the Hiring Partner at RJG. He joined the firm in 1985 as an associate. He came to the area to run a congressional campaign for Mark Holtzman, and stayed to join the firm as a civil trial lawyer. He has no doubt that

easily involved with the community. We can walk down the street and say 'hello' to people that we know in business and through community activities. That really can't happen in a bigger city. I get the sense that my colleagues in larger places, although they have the same advantages of different departments and the support of a larger firm, are just not finding that ability to really connect with the community.

Associate Claire Turcotte has been with the firm for a year and a half. She and her husband moved to the area in part because of the natural beauty and living conditions.

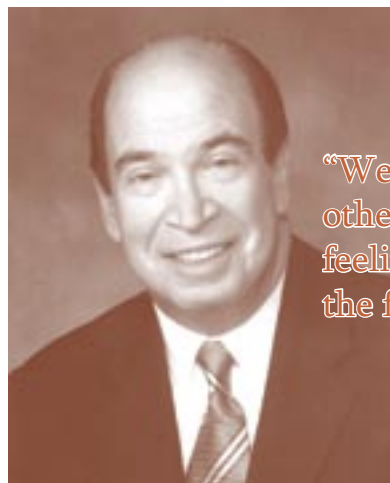
"There is a wonderful balance here between professional opportunities and family life. And the big cities are close enough to get to easily.

"I think that one of the things I like most about being at RGJ is the flexibility and support I've been given for my own efforts. RJG demonstrates a strong commitment to its associates. They hire very carefully, and then once hired, they give the associates every opportunity to grow and become successful lawyers.

"I'm still exploring opportunities for civic involvement. My husband and I were part of last year's Leadership Lackawanna Executive Institute, and now I'm looking for opportunities for more involvement here in Luzerne county."

Sounds as if theory's working just fine.

The practice of law has changed since the early days. Judge Rosenn's early



"We genuinely care about each other, and we promote that feeling to new associates joining the firm." Murray Ufberg

"I tell new associates to be dedicated and disciplined in their work

immediate sense of the

and to become involved. But in addition to giving advice orally, I think we teach our associates by example. Once they see how dedicated all of our lawyers are to their clients and to the community, it becomes easy to follow suit."

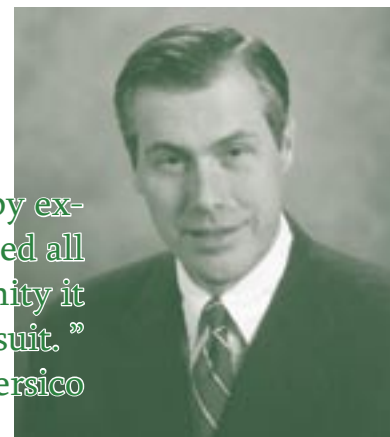
I spoke with two of the associates to see if the theory was working in actual practice.

New associate Connell McNulty came back to Wilkes-Barre in 2003 after working for firms in Washington, Boston and New York City.

"Life is easier here," he says, "it's a more relaxed place to live and work. Law is more or less the same wherever you

"I think we teach our associates by example; once they see how dedicated all of our lawyers are to the community it becomes easy to follow suit."

Joseph Persico



culture of giving at RJG.

"I try to impart to new hires a sense of the history of the place—and a sense of the obligation of giving that's been instilled in all of us by the original partners, most of whom are still leading us by example. I tell them that they are part of something that's been an incredible asset to this community, and that they need to make a commitment back because part of why we are who we are, and what we are, is due to the hard work of the original partners in the community. We need to continue that work."

Schaub sees an additional advantage to civic involvement.

"In my 'day job' as a litigator, I spend most of my time battling with other lawyers, judges, and sometimes even my own clients. I can contrast that with my community work—at the end of the day I can go from the pressure of the courtroom to a Boy Scout meeting where I see all the simple and beautiful things we are doing for young people in NEPA. It gives one perspective."

Joseph Persico, a partner at RJG is quick to agree.

"We believe in giving back to the community, which of course supports us. We're proud that we can give back. Although RJG is like a big city law firm, with its departments and specialties, we are in a small town. This means we can become

practice—I'll get the same opportunities here as in a larger city, but the environment is so much better. There are people I know here, friends, family...it's a nice feeling."

Asked about civic involvement, he answers, "I haven't been back long enough to really become involved, but I want to start in my own neighborhood. I'm hoping the downtown will become revitalized again, and I want to be a part of that. It seems like we're on the right path; the future here in this area seems very bright."

views on specialization turned out to be correct, and the firm is departmentalized. They have also realized that aside from specialization, they need to cover almost every aspect of law to be able to provide everything necessary to their clients. "We've now gone into health law," says Murray Ufberg, "and are the only firm in NEPA with a health lawyer concentrating on this field full time. I anticipate going into new fields, or at least fields that are new to this firm as we continue to expand and grow."

passionately about their upbringing and the quality of life they experienced here. There are definitely some discrepancies with money compared with larger ur-



“There is a wonderful balance here in this area between professional and family life.” Claire Turcotte

ban areas, but they’ve experienced life in

those areas and want to come back here, reestablish their roots and find that feeling of community once again. Since 9/11, quality of life has become very important, and that’s something people feel they can find here.”

Judge Rosenn adds, “There is great opportunity for Wilkes-Barre right now. We’re strategically located between New York City and Philadelphia at the

crossroads of major highway systems. There are great opportunities here for Wilkes-Barre if it has the leadership it deserves. I think that with the new mayor and county commissioners there is a feeling of expectation in the community of greater things to come.”

Gene Roth has lived in Wilkes-Barre all his life.

“I’ve seen this area at its best and I’ve seen it at its worst,” he says.

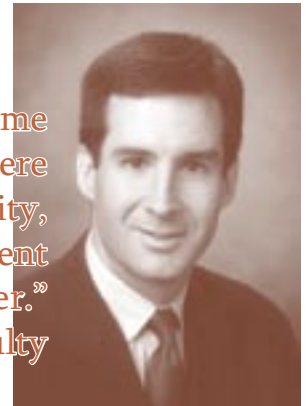
“Now I am seeing huge changes. I think that we will see a big increase in self-esteem for the area, and I think we are on the edge of evolving. I hope that we can excite the younger people, since they are the people who will ultimately make a difference to our area. We need their talents. And we feel that

here at RJG we are giving them a chance to be part of that future.”



RJG celebrates its fiftieth anniversary this May. It is the largest and oldest law firm in NEPA. It continues to expand, both in people and locations, while keeping a firm grip on the values of its founders.

Or, as Max Rosenn puts it simply, “It’s fulfilled all of my ambitions for what I thought would be a good law firm.”



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