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## Plaintiff lawyers put Corboy to work as president of their association

By Pat Milhizer

Law Bulletin staff writer

In a corner office with curtains that can block out views of City Hall's rooftop garden and the Daley Center plaza with the push of a button, there's a podium that seems out of place.

"We spend so much time sitting down and writing and reading and answering phones," Philip Harnett Corboy Jr. explains, "that I find it's a lot healthier to stand up sometimes. Especially if I'm going to be on the phone or writing something for any length of time."

The wooden podium also follows Corboy to the courtroom, where he represents plaintiffs in just about every type of personal-injury case except for medical malpractice.

And now the public speaking skills that he has honed through trial work are going to be on display at various seminars and symposiums in a new role over the next 12 months.

Friday marked the start of Corboy's term as president of the Illinois Trial Lawyers Association.

Corboy, a Rogers Park native, initially thought that his professional career was going to play out in Washington, D.C.

Known as "Flip" to his family and friends, Corboy graduated from Villanova University in 1973 and became a patronage worker for U.S. Sen. Adlai Stevenson. Later, he worked on the legislative staff of a member of the U.S. House.

He decided to come home after about a year to attend DePaul University College of Law, thinking a law degree would serve him well on Capitol Hill in whatever he was going to do.

But during a night out in Lincoln Park in 1975, Corboy ran into Raymond J. Smith, a criminal-defense lawyer who was looking for a clerk. Corboy took the job, graduated from law school in 1977 and joined the firm.

After about a year with Smith, Corboy joined the Cook County state's attor-



Paul McGrath

The view from Philip Harnett Corboy Jr.'s offices is of the combined City Hall-County Building. As the new president of the Illinois Trial Lawyers Association, working with governmental bodies will be a significant responsibility.

ney's office, and Washington, D.C., was officially in his rearview mirror.

He started out in Traffic Court and worked his way up to prosecuting felonies. Being a prosecutor was "one of the best jobs I could ever possibly hope for," Corboy said.

"It was a tremendous learning experience, and it was a wonderful group of people I was working with. Everybody was devoted to their jobs and doing the right thing," Corboy said. "Everybody knew you were overworked and underpaid, but

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that was part of the deal and you accepted it.”

One morning in 1985, Corboy was getting ready to handle a murder case as first chair when he realized that he just couldn't get excited about the trial.

“I remember shaving and getting ready to try a murder that occurred at 2 or 3 o'clock in the morning at a bar on the West Side, and I remember the victim — we couldn't find any family. Nobody really cared,” Corboy said.

“It was involving a dispute, and some guy pulled out a knife and stabbed him. It was one of those things that was senseless, but at the same time, when you can't find any family members or friends, you're wondering what's going on in the world. This guy's going to come and go, and nobody's going to really be able to memorialize him. Nobody's going to remember him,” Corboy said.

So Corboy went to his boss and suggested that the second-chair prosecutor should run the case. Corboy tried one more case before he left the office.

He had interviewed at Baker & McKenzie LLP and was called for a second interview at the U.S. attorney's office in southern California. Thomas A. Demetrio, whose partner was and still is Corboy's father, Philip H. Corboy, heard that the younger Corboy had been interviewing for jobs and invited him to lunch.

Corboy hadn't thought about working for his father, who is regarded as a legend in the Chicago legal community and considered a mentor by many top trial lawyers in the city.

“Maybe in the back of my mind I deliberately didn't want to think about coming over here so I just sort of blocked it out,” Corboy said.

The younger Corboy already had the

trial experience, having handled about 40 jury trials during his time in the state's attorney's office. But he had to catch up on civil law.

Having studied the civil side in law school, “it wasn't as if I was trying to learn a difficult foreign language,” Corboy said.

Corboy joined Corboy & Demetrio in the summer of 1985.

Since then, he's settled or tried to verdict some 37 cases in which plaintiffs have recovered at least \$1 million. One of those cases includes an instance in which the defendants offered \$1 million to settle, the plaintiff rejected, and a trial yielded a verdict for \$16 million, Demetrio said.

“So my direct observation over three weeks of trial is he's an excellent lawyer,” Demetrio said. And compliments don't just come from Corboy's firm colleagues.

“When trial lawyers go to trial, they need to rely on the person's word that they're in or out and where the focus is and what witnesses are going to do,” said defense lawyer Jeremiah P. Connolly of Bollinger, Ruberry & Garvey.

“The bottom line is he won't tell me ‘I'm not looking at your client’ and then sandbag me. Sometimes, it's bad news and he says my client is at fault. If he tells me bad news, I know he means it. His word is gold, and I don't have egg on my face at the end of the day,” Connolly said.

Corboy, 57, said he plans to bring a proactive approach to his role as ITLA's president, especially in Springfield.

In the most recent legislative session that ended Saturday, lawmakers failed to act on two ITLA-backed bills — one that would provide businesses with incen-

tives to have safe working environments and another that would require nursing homes to carry liability insurance. Corboy said he will continue the lobbying effort to try to push those measures forward.

“We're like every other constituency down there, though. There seems to be a logjam. There's not a lot going on down there of substance. And I think we've been caught like everybody else in these intramural disputes,” Corboy said.

Corboy said he wanted the presidency so that he could continue the battle against insurance companies and the business community to help personal-injury plaintiffs. In one major fight, ITLA members hope that the Illinois Supreme Court will declare a state law unconstitutional because it caps pain-and-suffering damages that plaintiffs can receive from hospitals and doctors.

“It's all about the money that these companies just don't want to pay. We find ourselves in a horrible business cycle right now and, as a result, these companies think one of the easiest ways to stop that hemorrhaging is to pick on poor plaintiffs who try to get into the courthouse,” Corboy said.

In their spare time, Corboy and his wife, Margaret, enjoy attending the baseball games of their 11-year-old son, Ryan, and the diving competitions of their 12-year-old daughter, Juliette.

And now's as good a time as any to take up the reins at ITLA, Corboy said.

“I should be giving back. I've been very blessed in my life in a whole host of ways. Once you get to a certain level, and you get comfortable in your life, it's at that time that you should start thinking seriously about returning back what you've been given.”