

"Aiding Public, Profession on New CBA President's Menu"

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The man who made history when he took over as president of the Chicago Bar Association Thursday afternoon said he expected as a young man to run the family restaurant instead.

But when he was a college senior, Michael K. Demetrio remembered, "Dad called and said, 'I got rid of the place because I want a better life for you.'"

"The place" was Tynan's, a restaurant popular with judges and lawyers that originally was located at LaSalle and Madison streets, and later at Adams and Wells streets.

"Was I disappointed?" Demetrio continued. "I was. Yeah. Then I turned my attention to the law and have never regretted it since."

Demetrio, the 130th CBA president, succeeds Jennifer T. Nijman of Winston & Strawn.

He also follows in the footsteps of his brother, former president Thomas K. Demetrio, with whom he practices at Corboy & Demetrio. It is the first time in CBA history that two brothers have held the office.

On top of that, Michael Demetrio is the seventh present or former member of the Corboy law firm to head the CBA, a record that no other firm can match, according to the association's executive director, Terrence M. Murphy.

Those six who already have completed their terms as CBA president are Philip H. Corboy, 1972; John D. Hayes, 1984; Richard J. Phelan, 1985; Thomas Demetrio, 1992; René A. Torrado, Jr., 1995; and Patricia C. Bobb, 1997.

Attorneys

- Michael K. Demetrio

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Torrado was CBA chief before he joined the Corboy firm. Hayes, Phelan, and Bobb rose to that office after they left the firm.

Murphy said that both Winston & Strawn and Gardner, Carton & Douglas also have produced several CBA presidents.

Demetrio attributed the fact that he and his brother both have become chiefs of the CBA to their parents, George and Madeline.

Both parents instilled “the concept of returning to society some of the benefits we’ve been lucky enough to receive,” he said.

“I would see my dad, when I was downtown working, stop and talk to the unfortunate individuals who wouldn’t have a home, might not necessarily have a job or something to eat, see him give them a free meal in the kitchen, slip them a couple bucks to get through a cold night. His restaurant was right next to St. Pete’s, and he worked with the priest there to make sure people who needed help were taken care of.”

The Demetrios’ mother worked in soup kitchens “long before it became an ‘in’ thing to do,” and was also active in church and schools and served as a Cub Scout den mother, Demetrio said.

Born and raised in Evanston, Demetrio started out washing dishes in his father’s restaurant. There he met lawyers and judges who were his father’s friends, such as Cook County Circuit Judges James A. Geroulis and Daniel P. Ward, before Ward became chief justice of the Illinois Supreme Court.

Nevertheless, until his father sold the restaurant, Michael Demetrio did not plan on being a lawyer. His older brother, Thomas Demetrio, already was.

After changing course, Michael Demetrio went to Chicago-Kent College of Law and became a Cook County prosecutor. He said he tried more than 50 cases to verdict, including multiple murders, and was the lead counsel in prosecuting a major escape case that involved six killers who broke out of the Cook County Jail.

By that year, 1985, Thomas Demetrio, seven years older, had become a partner in Corboy & Demetrio.

Yet when he went into private practice, Michael Demetrio joined a different law firm started by lawyer who had just left Corboy’s shop: Robert A. Clifford.

“Clifford offered me a job,” Demetrio explained.

“Mike has done a very successful job of creating his own persona and stature in the legal community separate and apart from his brother,” said Clifford, head of Clifford Law Offices. “He’s his own man. “I’ve been in court with him, tried cases with him,” Clifford said, describing Demetrio as “studious,” “tenacious,” “very polished in the courtroom, “quick witted,” and “very smart.” He also said Demetrio is a “very affable, friendly guy,” a description echoed by others.

After two years with Clifford, Michael Demetrio switched to Corboy & Demetrio.

That came about after Thomas Demetrio asked for permission to recruit him.

Clifford said he told the elder brother, "Fine, as long as it's you. We gotta keep family together."

Focusing on aviation litigation, product liability and vehicular accident law, Michael Demetrio has brought in multimillion-dollar settlements or awards more than 30 times in his career, including a \$22 million award in a case he tried with his brother.

Corboy said of him, "He's got the work ethic that all lawyers in this field, the personal-injury trial field, used to have.....He sets the example. He knows you do not do things off the seat of your pants. Michael does not make presumptions. He goes behind every issue."

Asked how Demetrio also had time to be so active in the CBA for 20 years, Corboy said, "the same way the other six did. I did it, and the people that followed me did it the same way.....He, like the other six in this office, regard it as a payback."

Michael Demetrio compared Corboy to the Demetrios' father in their insistence on paying back society.

Corboy also argues that bar association work is essential to being a top lawyer.

Michael Demetrio said he considers his biggest contributions to the CBA so far to be his work in the evaluations of judicial candidates and helping make policy decisions on the constitutionality of legislation. He was active in raising money for and refinancing the CBA headquarters building, at 321 S. Plymouth Court.

He has raised funds for the CBA's Lend-A-Hand program, which finances mentoring programs for disadvantaged youth, and he created an award for that program in his brother's name. Demetrio said he, along with Murphy, will take over direct supervision of the program this year.

Demetrio said of his presidency, "This is a full-time job."

"He's totally committed to the bar association and all that's associated with it, the ethics, improving the search for good judges," commented William J. Bauer, senior judge of the 7th Circuit U.S. Court of Appeals, who nominated Demetrio for CBA office.

Demetrio is married to Cook County Associate Judge Mary K. Rochford, whom he met while both were students at the University of Notre Dame. They have two children, Thomas, 14, and Patrick, 9.

Having two brothers as major bar association presidents is extremely rare, according to Murphy of the CBA. Among the three major metropolitan bar associations in the U.S., in Chicago, New York and Los Angeles, it has happened only once before.

In New York, Joseph and William Choate held the presidency of the Association of the Bar of the City of New York in 1888 and 1903.

Also taking office Thursday in the CBA's annual meeting at the Standard Club were 1st Vice President Joy V. Cunningham, senior vice president and general counsel for Northwestern Memorial Hospital; and 2d Vice President Michael B. Hyman, a partner with Much, Shelist, Freed, Denenberg, Ament & Rubenstein.* Article Reprinted with the Permission of the Chicago Daily Law Bulletin.