

Embodying 'The Good Stuff'

By Don Sarvey

Profile of Incoming PBA President Bill Pugh

Incoming PBA President Bill Pugh seems made for the role he's about to assume: president of the Pennsylvania Bar Association. "It's a social job, and I think I'm a social kind of a person," he says. He's amiable and genial and displays a genuine interest in what his brother and sister lawyers are doing. "I like to hang out and listen to people. I'm a good listener."

All of that seems natural enough for someone who's a highly successful medical defense attorney. You can just see this guy in a courtroom with a jury. Long-time friend and colleague Mark Kearney, now a federal judge, calls Pugh "an exceptional lawyer *by instinct*." Kearney explains that Pugh relates to people in a way that makes them want to trust him. What better trait to have for traveling the state to build rapport and support within a diverse legal community?

Law partner Paul Troy says he has relied on Pugh's personal and professional advice and judgment for 25 years and is certain that he will be a "great, great ambassador" for the PBA. But more than that, Troy adds, the PBA will benefit from someone whose strength is making the complex understandable. "Nobody can get from Point A to Point B faster than Bill."

William H. Pugh V, age 53, is managing partner of the 32-lawyer Norristown law firm of Kane, Pugh, Knoell, Troy &



Kramer LLP. One could argue that he is in the midst of a life foreordained. Growing up, he remembers his father, the original Pugh in the partnership, having — as Bill saw it — all the fun, and he determined as early as in a third-grade career report that he was going to follow the same path. Pugh recalls that his father and his father's partner, Ed Kane, "were guys who always seemed to work hard but have fun. They

had a lot of great war stories about the cases they tried. They liked going to work." In fact, his dad used to say that "being a lawyer beats working."

When Pugh was a senior at Springfield High School his father arranged for him to work for five weeks as an intern in the Montgomery County District Attorney's Office. "I just fell in love with the idea of



being a lawyer,” he says. After high school, he was off to the University of Richmond, intent on majoring in political science as a lead-in to law school. After Richmond, he went to law school at Villanova, graduating in 1986. He hints that law school did not excite him: “It was kind of a necessary evil [in order] to do what I wanted to do.” The best part may have been that it was where he met his future wife, Mary Coyne. “She was on the law review and I was not — let’s just leave it at that,” he says with a laugh.

After his second year at Villanova, Pugh interned at the New York County District Attorney’s Office in Manhattan. It was exciting, says Pugh, and it ignited a desire to become a prosecutor. After graduation,

he took a job as an assistant district attorney in New York City; he was there for three years, 1986-89, working under famed DA Robert M. Morgenthau. He had six weeks of intense training at the start and then plunged into trying cases in an operation that churned with round-the-clock intake. The experience was right out of TV’s “Law & Order.” Pugh notes that his kids — four daughters — love that show “and they can’t believe their father ever did anything that cool.”

It was during his time in New York City that he and Mary got married. She was working in Philadelphia and they decided to live in Princeton, N.J., as a compromise location. But then their first child came

along. “We had to make a choice,” Pugh says. He opted to return to Norristown to become an associate in his father’s firm. (Pugh’s father is now officially retired, though he still comes to the office several days a week. His brother, Robert, came out of Villanova Law a few years after he did and is also a partner at the firm.) The Pughs’ oldest child, Allison, is now 26 and recently married. The couple’s other daughters are Megan, 25; Katie, 21; and Lauren, 20. Mary is professionally active as executive director of the widely admired Montgomery Child Advocacy Project, a nonprofit that provides free legal services to abused and neglected children. Family has always been bedrock for the couple. Pugh is explicitly proud that he didn’t miss

any of his girls' parent-teacher conferences from kindergarten through eighth grade or miss any back-to-school nights when they were in high school.

Pugh's resume of bar achievements is a substantial one. He is a fellow of the American College of Trial Lawyers, an honor he's particularly proud of, and he currently serves in the House of Delegates of the American Bar Association. He has held the presidency of the Montgomery Bar Association (as did his father) and the Montgomery County Trial Lawyers Association.



His involvement with the PBA began when he was Zone 9 governor, representing Bucks, Chester, Delaware and Montgomery counties on the PBA Board of Governors. After finishing his board term he ran successfully for PBA vice president and entered the line of officer succession, which this year leads him to the bar presidency. He has co-chaired the PBA Diversity Task Force with Dauphin County lawyer Sam Cooper and is a member of the PBA's Planning Committee, House of Delegates and Civil Litigation Section.

His agenda for his year as president is modest and straightforward. He wants to strengthen three existing programs that he considers vital: promoting diversity within

the PBA and the profession; encouraging and spreading the word about the pro bono activities of PBA members; and finding ways to stimulate membership growth. Paul Troy says Pugh will be a "steady hand" but won't be one "to try to create legacy projects."

When not in the office or involved in PBA activities, Pugh can be found puttering around the pool or garden at home, rooting for the Phillies or the Eagles, paging through one of the "Clifton Chronicles" books by Jeffrey Archer or hanging out at the family place in Ocean City, N.J. As Pugh put it, he "grew up" in Ocean City, ensconced there in the summer, from the day school let out right up to Labor Day. He worked seven years as a lifeguard and developed a passion for surfing, which he is still known to indulge with visits to a "surfing camp" in Wilmington, N.C. As one colleague noted, "It's not your usual lawyerly golf trip."

Robert F. Morris, a partner in the Plymouth Meeting law firm of Morris Wilson PC, considers Pugh a respected friend with whom he enjoys a congenial relationship even though they work different sides in often hard-fought med-mal cases. "He doesn't give an inch, but he's one of the most civil and honest lawyers," Morris declares. In fact, Morris has praise for the entire family: Pugh, his father, his wife and his brother, Bob. "It's one of those families that's larger than life," Morris says. "What the family stands for is toughness, fairness, honesty — all the good stuff." ☞

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Don Sarvey is editorial director of *The Pennsylvania Lawyer* magazine.

Photos taken during the Pugh interview by Richard Quindry Photography, www.Quindry.com.

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