

Honoring the Heroes Among Us - David R. Punzak



David firmly believes that, when every lawyer retires, as they look back and reflect upon their life and career, they will remember the time they spent helping others, most fondly of all.

Having been born and raised in St. Petersburg, David Punzak learned early on a strong sense of community, and the importance of volunteerism. While attending local schools (Pasadena Elementary, Azalea Junior High, and Boca Ciega High School), his mother, Sue Punzak, served as a role model for him. She always encouraged David to join up – for Little League (which he played for 10 years); to try out for school clubs and teams; to learn what was going on in St. Pete, and to get involved. When he was young, his mother volunteered to teach workers at his dad’s business how to read and write. For many years in the 1960’s, his mother served as President of the PTA at Pasadena Elementary. His father, Bob Punzak, the owner of RSVP Auto Parts, donated used cars every year to the PTA, that raised money in very popular at the time, “Smash the Car” contests. That may have been the first “Cash for Clunkers” program!

While in high school at Bogie, David played on the baseball team for 3 years, and served as the President of the Interact Club. The Interact Club provided many scholarships from fundraising events like car washes and car rallies. When he graduated, David was named Most Likely to Succeed.

In 1978, David left St. Pete to attend the University of Florida, where he obtained a degree in Business Administration in early December, 1981. After 3 fun-filled weeks that December, David started law school at the University of Florida in January, 1982, and he graduated in 1984.

Though he had no specific plans to

return here, after he graduated, David came back to St. Pete and started working at the Baynard Harrell Mascara & Ostow law firm. He was the only associate in a law firm with 6 partners, so he learned a good deal about many different areas of the law, very quickly. One of the partners at that law firm, Roy G. Harrell, Jr. (who won the Heroes Among Us Award posthumously in 2008), became his mentor, and helped teach him the practice of law. More importantly, Roy taught David the true value of community service. Roy’s philosophy was simple – you will do community service; the things you volunteer for must be meaningful to you (your heart must be in it; or don’t do it); you should always strive to be the leader of whatever organization you’re involved in; and if you do those things, you will leave the world a better place.

David took that philosophy to heart, and 26 years later, he has made a difference in our community. He went through Leadership St. Pete in 1987, was a Board member for 6 years, and chaired the LSP Planning Committee in 1994. He served on the Board of the Suncoast Center for Community Mental Health for 8 years, and Chaired that Board in 1998. He served on the Board of The Florida International Museum for 5 years, and was its Chairman in 2005/2006. He served on the Board of the Pinellas Association for Retarded Children for 8 years, and served as its Chairman in 2006. He has served for 3 years on the Board of the Suncoasters of St. Petersburg, and Chaired that Board last year. He has served on the St. Pete Junior League Community Advisory Board, and currently serves on the Board of the Community Foundation

of Tampa Bay, on the Salvation Army Advisory Board, and on the Salvador Dali Museum Board. David has served for the past 6 years on the City's Development Review Commission, serving as its Chairman for the past 2 years.

However, David is most proud of the National Public Service Award that he received from the Business Law Section of the American Bar Association in 2006. David was given that nationwide award by the ABA for his decade-long pro bono representation of The Florida Community Loan Fund, a non-profit lending institution that makes loans to other non-profit organizations in the State of Florida, often to provide subsidized and low income housing, but also to provide capital for social change and community development.

When David started with Carlton Fields in 1994, it became immediately apparent that his philosophy of giving back to the community meshed perfectly with Carlton Fields' history and philosophy of community service. William Reece Smith, one of the patriarchs of the law firm, has made it known to all Carlton Fields lawyers that giving back to your community is part of every lawyer's obligation. For the past 17 years, David has had the privilege of working with Sylvia Walbolt, a Heroes Among Us Award winner from 2009. Like Reece, Sylvia has demonstrated through her words and deeds, her commitment to volunteerism and to bettering our community. Carlton Fields understands the importance of, and encourages its lawyers to provide pro bono service.

If David could have one professional wish, it would be this: that every lawyer in this community be given the chance to do something good for this area, and that they seize the opportunity, and do it. A day seldom goes by where David doesn't spend some time providing community service.

David and his wife Linda, have 4 children – Emily, who attends UF, Bobby, who attends USEF, and Andrew and Caroline, who attend St. Pete High. With 4 teenagers, life around the Punzak household can be hectic sometimes. David hopes all of his children will give back to their communities, wherever they live. David also looks forward to the day, many years down the road, when he retires from the active practice of law, where he is able to go “in house” at a non-profit or civic organization in this community, or where he enters local politics.

The St. Pete Bar Foundation is proud to honor David as a “Hero Among Us”.

