

# RICK DEL GIUDICE

## Familial Selflessness Motivates Boutique Business Trial Lawyer

by Dustin J. Seibert



Richard A. Del Giudice has an inherent level of sacrifice and selflessness. He demonstrated as much very early in his career with a sacrifice that would make many Chicago sports fans cringe.

As a newly minted attorney fresh out of law school, Del Giudice was in Wilmington, North Carolina, in January 1986. He was third chair for Gozdecki, Zido & Behnke on an antitrust civil lawsuit in federal court between two tugboat companies. The first chair was the late Gene Gozdecki, whom Del Giudice considers a great mentor.

The jury trial occurred at the same time the Chicago Bears had their historic Super Bowl XX win. A staunch fan of the team, Del Giudice had tickets to the game but gave them up to participate in the trial. Fortunately, his legal team won the case, as the Bears won the Super Bowl.

“Afterward, we were talking to the judge and Gene told him, ‘You know, Rick gave up his tickets to watch the Bears in the Super

Bowl to be here,’” Del Giudice recalls. “And then the judge said, ‘Well, you should have told me. I would have given you a few extra days to start the trial.’ He was being serious. I thought, ‘Oh, man.’”

That fateful case was more impactful than just the cost of missing the Super Bowl. It remains one of most resonant cases of his career, after more than three decades, simply because it was his first exposure to what he would come to love: trial work.

“It was a great experience watching Gene, with his Big Law intellect, carving up the case—and watching the local lawyer telling stories in a good-old-boy fashion,” he says. “It was the exclamation point on my decision to be a trial attorney and set the path for something I still love doing to this day.”

By 1992, Del Giudice had quickly become a name partner at the firm, now known as Gozdecki, Del Giudice, Americus, Farkas & Brocato LLP, a full-service boutique business

law firm founded by Gozdecki in 1983 after he left Mayer, Brown & Platt.

### HARD-WORKING FAMILY VALUES

Del Giudice grew up in Cicero, the product of a hard-working, blue-collar family. He attributes much of his success to his family, especially his mother, Sabina Lynch. Divorced from his father when Del Giudice was an infant, she did not get the opportunity to go to college. She had to work menial jobs below her intellectual ability to support him and his older sister Lynne. Watching his mother sacrifice and work so hard for her children had a big impact on Del Giudice.

“My mother shaped me with the assistance of my stepfather, Jim Lynch, but she was really my rock,” he says. “She taught me to be honest, do the right thing, work hard, compete, not cut corners and treat people the way you want them to treat you. She was my first and lasting inspiration.”

Del Giudice's mother was a huge baseball fan who played White Sox games on the radio for her kids. It got into his blood, motivating him to become a baseball player. He enrolled in Fenwick High School, a private institution in Oak Park. His parents had to scrape to pay the tuition, which motivated Del Giudice to work hard to achieve academically and in baseball.

At Fenwick, Del Giudice first began to think he might someday become an attorney. A couple of his friends from the school had fathers who were attorneys, and he thought it was something he would really enjoy.

"I went to Fenwick with the misguided mindset that everybody was smarter than I and had more money than my family," he says. "That resulted in a healthy chip on my shoulder. I did not want to disappoint my parents, who were sacrificing to send me somewhere they really could not afford."

Del Giudice followed his baseball dreams to college when he obtained a scholarship to play at the University of Miami in Florida. He learned relatively quickly that reaching the big leagues was improbable.

"Early on, with all the talent around me, I saw it was not likely I was going to make money throwing the baseball," he says, "so I also focused on academics."

After obtaining an accounting degree from University of Miami, Del Giudice worked for three years at Ernst & Whinney (now Ernst & Young), then a "Big Eight" accounting firm. "I respected the accountants and the brain power it takes," he says. "If I had loved it, I would have stayed. But I did not like it enough to change my childhood dream of becoming an attorney."

At the time, Del Giudice was just starting a family and had two small children at home. He was a day student who clerked full-time on weekdays and evenings. He also tended bar on weekends. It was a grind reminiscent of his blue-collar upbringing.

"To me, it was just what you do," he says. "You're young, you have things you want to accomplish, and you do not take shortcuts. You think you can do it all, so you do not think about how hard it is. I just kept my head down and kept pushing."

#### **BUILDING A LEGAL CAREER**

Owing to his accounting background, Del Giudice figured his natural path as a lawyer would be to get into tax, estate planning, and corporate/mergers and acquisitions work. He changed his mind, however, and took his first legal job at the then-nascent Gozdecki, Zido

& Behnke firm, a litigation boutique.

"Gene was an antitrust prosecutor in Washington, D.C., then a rock star litigator at Mayer Brown. He wanted more of a boutique practice. He hired me as his law clerk in my first year of law school," he says.

"I fell in love with litigation and antitrust work. We were doing high-end, complex litigation with an element of competition that I really enjoyed. The transactional side did not have as much of the competitive piece."

Del Giudice was interviewing with large firms, a more attractive proposition given the higher salary that would benefit his young and growing family. He ultimately opted to stay with Gozdecki to work for less than half the salary he was offered elsewhere.

"Gene convinced me I would be better off professionally if I stayed with him instead of going to a larger law firm," Del Giudice says. "It was better for me to be at a smaller firm, where I was able to take depositions and try cases sooner than I would at a larger law firm. I

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got the opportunity to be an entrepreneur and develop business. I have never had a moment of regret about that decision."

Decades later, Del Giudice still possesses that entrepreneurial spirit, only now he heads up a firm of 20 lawyers. He credits his great partners and the other attorneys with whom he has worked for a large part of the firm's success.

"I have always kept a full litigation and trial workload and still made time to go develop business," he says. "In large part, it is because of terrific colleagues that I can do that." Among those colleagues are Del Giudice's longtime and trusted partners Dave Americus and Earl Farkas, each of whom has been with the firm for almost 30 years.

One of those partners, Joseph Brocato, has worked with Del Giudice since joining the firm in 2014.

"Rick is a truly unique attorney. He embodies a rare combination of remarkable intelligence, fierce advocacy for his clients, and

extraordinary rainmaking skills," Brocato says. "It's an honor not only to call Rick my partner but also to call him a great friend."

#### **WHY HE LOVES TRIAL LAW**

After 33 years, Del Giudice still possesses the intellectual curiosity for the law and the competitive spirit he finds necessary to be a successful trial attorney.

"The competitive part of it still stimulates me," he says. "While being a trial attorney can be tough and unforgiving at times, I have never felt, 'Oh darn, I have to go into the office.'"

"Having mostly privately owned clients is important to me, also. I truly appreciate and enjoy the personal relationships with my clients, and most become friends."

Rocky Wirtz is the chairman of Chicago-based Wirtz Corporation and its related companies, which have been clients of the firm for more than 30 years.

"The last thing you ever want to do is go to court," Wirtz says, "but if you have to, you want Rick on your side."

"He won't ever back down from anything. Plus, he's honest—he's not trying to see how many people he can get in a room to pad the expense."

Randy Skoda is a longtime client and president/CEO of Topco Associates. "I think what distinguishes Rick is that he knows the law, but just as importantly, he has made it his priority to know and understand our business to ensure all our needs are met by his and his team's expertise. It is that combination of skilled expertise, critical thinking and business acumen that places Rick as one of the best in his field."

Del Giudice has obtained additional family inspiration from his "amazing wife," Jennifer, and his "six wonderful daughters."

"I could never have done this without the support, love, and sacrifices of my wife and daughters," he says. "The old saying that 'Behind every successful man there are even stronger women' applies to me.

"I have learned so much from these outstanding ladies in my life. They are my heart and soul, and they motivate me to be the best person I can be." And that, above everything else, is what he wants people to know about him.

"I am not defined by being an attorney or having been an athlete. I am defined by the wonderful family around me. I was shaped by a great family when I was a child, and I have been so blessed to have such a great family of my own as an adult."

So, what saying would he choose for his tombstone? "He loved and was blessed by the 'ladies' in his life." ■