



# Young Lawyers Section

## The Growth of the Boutique Firm

by Kathryn Walter  
YLS Futures Committee



We see it increasingly in the news: successful cadres of specialty attorneys splintering off large law firms - the rise of the boutique law firm. Boutique firms have an appeal for both the consumers of their services and the lawyers that provide them.

A boutique firm is typically small or mid-sized and features a clearly defined niche practice in the legal market. The most common boutique firms specialize in employment, family law, or complex litigation, but can be in any defined practice area. Boutique firms target lawyers who are recognized specialists in a discrete area of law, and these firms focus on providing high quality legal services in that niche.

One of the most attractive benefits is that boutique law firms are true experts in their field and recruit and retain specialists - often attorneys who are recognized as leaders in their field. This expertise often enables clients to realize cost savings and superior results. Boutiques leverage a thorough and nuanced understanding of the particular area of law and an enhanced knowledge of changes in the particular legal niche. This provides efficient identification and resolution of issues. Additionally, by cultivating an area of expertise, boutiques cater to lawyers who desire to specialize in a particular area of law. For many attorneys, this is an ideal practice environment.

Troy Pickard, who runs the boutique law firm Portland Defender and handles criminal and landlord-tenant matters, says the smaller size of boutique firms is advantageous for clients and attorneys. "My clients benefit financially from my firm's low overhead, and they never have to worry about getting passed around through different levels of inter-firm bureaucracy," said Pickard. In many ways, the boutique law firm is the legal community's response to increasing demands from clients to address increasingly complex legal issues while concurrently cutting costs.

Boutique firms also tend to be more agile and flexible than their integrated-firm counterparts. Boutiques can more rapidly leverage new technologies, adapting and taking advantage of the ever-changing technology landscape. There are no technology committees at far-off home offices to consult to adopt new innovations. This is attractive to many attorneys, especially those who are younger and more technology savvy, who expect technology to facilitate their practice. Additionally, the nimbler environments facilitate flexible work practices, including the ability to work remotely. As such, boutique firms are able to attract and retain talented attorneys because many of these firms enable a better work-life balance and provide the structure for experts to excel.

Boutique firms will continue to inhabit a growing presence in the future landscape of the law. For attorneys, the boutique firm may be a place to grow as an expert in a specialized area of law. For clients, the boutique firm may provide the superior legal support at a reasonable price. It is this competitive edge that ensures the future of the boutique firm.

## Bruce Rothman Pro Bono Spotlight

by Michael Fuller  
YLS Pro Bono Committee

This month's spotlight focuses on pro bono attorney Bruce Rothman and his efforts volunteering with the Legal Aid Services of Oregon Senior Law Project (SLP). For over 20 years, Bruce has tirelessly worked pro bono to help low-income Portland-area consumers solve legal problems. In 2009, he was presented with the MBA Pro Bono Award of Merit, honoring over two decades of pro bono service. He was distinguished as having served more volunteer hours than any other pro bono Legal Aid attorney. In the last five years since receiving the Award of Merit, Rothman's advocacy has continued, primarily with the SLP.

Despite having no lawyers in his immediate family, Bruce was engaged in the law from an early age. "Social justice always interested me," he says. "I thought I could make a contribution."

In his youth, Rothman traveled to Salem as a delegate with the YMCA Legislature. As a high school student in the 1950s, he recalls walking to the courthouse to watch attorneys try cases.

Rothman started his law practice in 1963, after graduating from Lewis & Clark Law School. In the 1970s, he focused

his practice on representing consumers in pharmaceutical litigation related to oral contraception. Bruce started litigating pharmaceutical cases locally, across the table from attorneys including Edwin Peterson and Bruce Spaulding. He eventually became a national advocate for consumers of oral contraception throughout the country.

Rothman formally retired from private practice in 1983, to focus on pro bono consumer protection issues. He became a member of the recently reinstated Oregon Consumer League, which is comprised of Jason Reynolds, Michael Baxter and other top consumer advocates. It represents the interests of Oregonians in matters involving unfair trade practices. Rothman's pro bono work with the league included helping consumers fight arbitration clauses and unconscionable disclaimers hidden in car dealer contracts.

Rothman's current pro bono service with the SLP focuses on obtaining reasonable accommodations for aging Portlanders living in subsidized housing. "It's 10% litigation, 90% problem solving," says Rothman, of his work with the Senior Law Project. "I had a case recently



Bruce Rothman

where we helped accommodate a little old lady whose landlord installed new garbage can lids that she just couldn't lift. In another case, we worked to create a safe place for smokers to congregate outside subsidized housing projects."

"In addition to being a very funny guy, Bruce Rothman's work is the stuff of legend," says Portland attorney David Sugerman. "[Bruce] represented consumers on dangerous drug and product cases in some of the most important public safety work done by trial lawyers. Consumers are fortunate that someone of his skill and ability continues working on pro bono matters. He is an inspiration," says Sugerman.

For more information about the recently reinstated nonprofit Oregon Consumer League, contact Joel Shapiro at joel@joelshapiro.com. For more information about the SLP, or to volunteer, contact supervising attorney Maya Crawford at maya.crawford@lasoregon.org.

## Getting "OLD" A Young Lawyer's Transition from the YLS to the "Big" MBA

by Sean Ray  
YLS Board



As I sit here on the eve of my 36<sup>th</sup> birthday, I find myself thinking about what's next for me in the MBA. YLS members "age out" after six years of practice or at age 36, whichever comes later. After achieving this milestone of aging, attorneys once considered "young" move on to the Older Lawyers Division, or "OLD" (of course, the "big" MBA does not have an acronym for "everyone who is not in YLS" and, if they did, I am fairly certain that they would not call it "OLD," but I digress). So what is an attorney to do once he or she reaches this milestone, and how does he or she prepare for it?

Certainly, as I look back, there were signs that this day was coming. Not too long ago, I heard a song I grew up listening to on the "oldies" station. Oldies. Not even "classic rock." Oldies. But that's not all. I noticed that younger attorneys started asking me how to do things. Legal things. I began recognizing everyone at YLS events, because I had been seeing them year after year.

Of course, this change should be welcomed, not lamented. While it is sad to close one chapter in my legal career - that of a "young lawyer" - it is exciting to start the next adventure. There are many positive ways younger - but no longer "young" - attorneys like me can contribute in the "big" MBA. YLS graduates have fresh perspectives and new ideas to infuse into the "big" MBA and, with new and different committees to join, a number of avenues with which to explore those ideas. The MBA has an abundance of committees from which to choose, some of which are complementary to their YLS counterparts, and some which are

completely different, including the Continuing Legal Education Committee, the Court Liaison Committee, the Courthouse/Court Funding Committee, the Equality & Diversity Committee, the Golf Committee, the Judicial Screening Committee, the Membership Committee, the Professionalism Committee and the MBF CourtCare Campaign Committee. In fact, I have found my first "big" MBA calling with the Golf Committee, raising money for the Volunteer Lawyers Project at Legal Aid Services of Oregon (LASO) - a worthy cause indeed - while simultaneously trying to solicit advice from fellow lawyer golfers on how to fix my swing (a client told me my problem was I was standing too close to the ball ... after I hit it).

Because the YLS is so well integrated into the "big" MBA, the transition from "young attorney" to plain, old "attorney" should be fairly seamless, and I look forward to positively contributing where I can, and meeting many of the "big" MBA members the same way I came to know many YLS members so well over the past several years.

So if you find yourself with an uncontrollable urge to yell at that law student intern (read "whippersnapper") to "get off my lawn," know that it is okay. The "big" MBA, and I, will be waiting for you.