

THE MUCHINS

Sticking Together in Law and in Life

by Elisabeth Martin

While Allan and Arthur Muchin were growing up in Manitowoc, Wisconsin, their mother often told her only children to stay close to each other.

Decades later and a state away, the two brothers have dutifully followed her advice. As each has made a name for himself in Chicago's legal and business communities, they and their own families have never been far apart professionally or personally.

Allan, 74, is now of counsel at **Katten Muchin Rosenman LLP**, the firm he helped to found early in his career as a tax attorney. Arthur, 66, remains of counsel for the boutique labor and employment firm where he is also a named partner, **Laner, Muchin, Dombrow, Becker, Levin and Tominberg Ltd.**

The two have shared plenty of clients over the years, as well as a mutual relationship with the Chicago White Sox and Chicago

go to school with all of their cousins, as well as Arthur's grandchildren, at a Jewish day school in the city. The family's closeness dates back to Andrea's own childhood in Highland Park, where Allan and Arthur's families were often together.

"Every time we go somewhere together, people know our cousins; they know my sisters. We've always lived in the same community," says Andrea, 48. "My grandmother had a huge impact on the whole family, in terms of sticking together and loyalty."

Trading Small-Town for Big-Time

Allan and Arthur both knew early on that they would eventually leave Manitowoc, where they got their first glimpse of life as a lawyer. Their father ran a general law practice with his own brother, and Allan and Arthur recall sitting around the dinner table

"I hoped that a tax practice would open up new opportunities if I went to a new city," he says.

Arthur considered taking the same route as his older brother, but an accounting course at Wisconsin soon put a stop to that.

"I hated every second of it," he says with a laugh. "I'll never forget this. I took out a dime and I taped it, because I was off a dime, I taped it to an exam, and I said, 'I just don't have the patience for this.' The T.A. did not think that was funny."

Fortunately, a law school class Arthur took with a renowned labor law professor turned him on to a field he actually enjoyed, and another class in arbitration cemented his plans to pursue labor law.

"I loved everything about the courses," he says. "I didn't know if I wanted to represent management or employees, but I knew labor law and employment were nothing but fun."

to a law firm, I wasn't a beginner."

Starting out in government work is a career move that Arthur and Andrea also wholeheartedly endorse, calling it invaluable for gaining trial experience and a deeper knowledge of the field. Arthur's time at the National Labor Relations Board gave him a chance to handle cases in federal court and before administrative law judges, while Andrea even had the opportunity to argue in front of the Illinois Supreme Court during her two years with the Cook County state's attorney's office right after law school.

"By the time I got to Schiller, I had spent a year and a half in a courtroom every single day. So that whole nervousness was gone; it was something I felt comfortable doing," Andrea says.

Allan's job at the IRS was also the beginning of his friendship with Jerry Reinsdorf, the principal owner of the Chicago White Sox and the Chicago Bulls. The two young lawyers met while working in the IRS' Chicago office and hit it off, eating together, smoking cigars and walking around the city during their lunch breaks. The bond they forged has lasted for 50 years.

"We've done everything together. I can't get rid of him," Reinsdorf affectionately jokes.

All joking aside, Reinsdorf credits Allan with orchestrating some of his own career's greatest successes, including the lucrative sale in 1982 of Reinsdorf's real estate company, Balcor. Allan also connected Reinsdorf with the necessary investors during Reinsdorf's 1981 purchase of the White Sox, and he serves as Reinsdorf's personal attorney.

"He's got a knack for (knowing) how to get it done," Reinsdorf says. "A lot of lawyers chase after ghosts, but he sees what's important and what's unimportant."

When Reinsdorf bought the White Sox and later, the Bulls, he says, there was no question that Allan would be part of the ownership group.

"Everyone respects him," Reinsdorf says. With a note of staunch loyalty in his voice, he adds, "If they didn't, they wouldn't tell me."

Allan says his involvement in both sports franchises has been an enjoyable and "interesting sidestep" in his career. So, is being a part-owner of two of the city's most beloved teams as glamorous as it seems?

"It's very glamorous when you win," he says with a laugh. "It doesn't get much better than winning six championships with Michael Jordan and a World Series."

Andrea says the benefits of Allan's ownership extend to her and her two sisters as well. They take their families to baseball



Allan Muchin, Andrea Muchin, and Arthur Muchin (from left).

Bulls: Allan is a minority owner in both teams, while Arthur handles their labor negotiations and employment-related matters.

Allan's daughter, Andrea, is continuing the family's legal tradition through her family law practice at **Schiller DuCanto & Fleck LLP**, earning accolades in her own right as an income partner for the firm.

"They have good lawyer genes," says Howard Pizer, the White Sox's vice president of administration and a family friend. "They've all done very well."

Outside of their work, you will often find the Muchins (pronounced MUE-shen) together, watching a ballgame or sharing a meal. Everyone lives within three miles of each other in Chicago, and Andrea's children

at night while their father regaled them with the details of his day.

"I just remember the stories," Arthur says. "Who he helped, and how he helped, and what kind of cases, and where he got angry. There was just no doubt that his legal career was really fun."

Allan and Arthur both completed an accelerated undergraduate and law school program at the University of Wisconsin, receiving two degrees in six years while they mulled over what field of law to choose. Allan ultimately chose tax work because he was drawn to its mathematical aspects and because he thought he could distinguish himself from other young lawyers in that practice.

A Spot in Chicago Sports

After graduation, both Allan and Arthur found themselves drawn to Chicago. Arthur calls his move to the city "happenstance," the result of a random placement by his first employer, the National Labor Relations Board, while Allan was offered a position with the Office of Regional Counsel of the Internal Revenue Service.

While at the IRS, Allan spent four years working on the agency's biggest and most complicated tax disputes before going into private practice. He says that government work was a great way to prepare for working at a firm.

"It was almost like a graduate school course in tax," he says. "By the time I went

and basketball games when they can.

“We always preferred the White Sox, even growing up in Highland Park,” she says.

Ironically, Arthur’s involvement with the teams came not through Allan, but through the White Sox’s Pizer, whom he met in college. Pizer, who also spent a stint at Allan’s firm, Katten Muchin, in the 1970s after Allan recruited him, tapped Arthur to handle labor and employment work for Balcor, the White Sox, the Bulls and the United Center beginning in the 1980s.

“I’ve always used (Arthur) for labor,” Pizer says. “He combines an extraordinary knowledge with a very practical and pragmatic approach.”

Arthur’s work has earned the respect of Reinsdorf as well, who calls him “a truly great labor lawyer.”

“He has a great way of getting labor negotiators comfortable, with a minimum of acrimony,” Reinsdorf says.

Leaving Their Mark on Firm Life

If Allan and Arthur’s work with Chicago’s sports teams is an interesting side project, the heart and soul of their careers has been their work with the firms they have spent decades helping to shape and manage.

Allan and his founding partners launched Katten Muchin Zavis in 1974, combining attorneys from the previous tax planning firm where Allan worked with a handful of lawyers from other disciplines. The premise was simple: create a full-service firm by hiring the best lawyers in a variety of areas and letting them focus on their specialties.

That kind of practice is fairly common today, Allan says, but it was a pioneering idea 30 years ago. And it worked. Since its inception, Katten Muchin has grown from 25 attorneys to more than 600, opening offices in a half-dozen cities across the country.

“Was it a leap of faith? Probably,” Allan says. “But it worked well and was successful.”

Allan helped to build the firm’s client base through his extensive public speaking on the law, a skill he developed early in his career that put him in front of audiences across the country. As for his own caseload, most of Allan’s tax planning over the years has involved business owners who required planning services for both their companies and their families.

“The complicated part is trying to fit the law and what you can actually do into their needs,” he says.

While Allan worked to grow Katten Muchin, Arthur reveled in the intimate atmosphere of Laner Muchin, the boutique labor law firm he joined in 1970 and where he has remained for his entire career. Arthur was the sixth lawyer to come onboard, and the firm still has just 35 attorneys.

“In 60 years, we have only had two equity partners leave the firm to go practice elsewhere,” Arthur says. “The philosophy of how we practice and what kind of firm we wanted to build is one that everyone’s bought into.”

Laner Muchin focuses on fostering close long-term relationships with its clients; the firm promises callbacks within two hours on its Web site and works off of annual retainer fees for many clients. As a result, Arthur has worked for decades with many of the companies he represents.

“I have a client that started with the firm in 1948, when it first started, and in 60 years, they’ve had two attorneys represent them: the founder of the firm and me,” he says. “You get to know the clients, you work with them every day...I love that philosophy.”

To Arthur, the key to successful labor negotiations is not only to make your client happy, but also to keep the other side satisfied.

“The thing in labor and employment that is different is that you continue to deal with the same people again and again,” he says. “If you’re negotiating a union contract, those employees aren’t going anywhere. Your relationship with the other side has to be positive so you can develop a long-term relationship.”

Joining the Tradition

Though the thought of becoming an attorney herself percolated in the back of Andrea’s mind for years, Allan said he first heard about his eldest daughter’s plans while he and his wife, Elaine, were on a college road trip with their youngest daughter. Andrea was finishing college at the University of Michigan, and she called her parents with some news.

“She said, ‘I think I’m going to take the LSATs and try to get into law school,’” Allan recounts. “That was interesting, because she had never mentioned it...I wasn’t trying to push her in any direction. I think it worked out very well.”

Andrea became the only one of Allan or Arthur’s children to go into the law. She applied to a handful of big-city law schools. She ultimately opted for Boston University, but she didn’t stay on the East Coast long.

“I always thought I would come back to Chicago,” she says. “I have a ton of family here, friends. Everything that is important to me is here.”

After two “boring” summers working for a big firm and clerking for a government agency, Andrea was anxious to find an area of the law that spoke to her. She even considered dropping law school in favor of a psychology degree. At the time, divorce was not even offered as a class at Boston University, but an accomplished divorce lawyer suggested that she give the field a chance.

“He said, ‘You should try divorce. It’s kind of like psychology, but you can use your law degree. But I would recommend you do something else first. The best divorce lawyers do something else first,’” she recalls.

Andrea accepted a job with the Cook County state’s attorney’s office and worked in appeals for two years before applying to divorce firms. When she got an offer from Schiller, one of the first firms in the country

to focus solely on family law, there was no question she would take it.

“When I was interviewing, there weren’t any other firms like this,” she says. “There’s a depth both beneath me and above me of expertise that I think you need going through a divorce.”

In her 20 years at Schiller, Andrea has gravitated toward cases that involve custody or other personal factors, giving her a chance to put both her interest in law and psychology to work. She plays a role that’s part attorney, part therapist, negotiating matters as smoothly as possible while reminding her client that “there’s going to be a life after this divorce.”

“I pride myself on solving people’s problems,” she says. “I’m in touch with my clients about both the littlest things in their lives and the biggest decisions they will ever make.”

Another point of pride for Andrea has been her track record over the last 10 years of bringing in all of her own clients.

“It certainly helps to be part of a firm like this, but I really feel that I have built a reputation for myself within it,” she says.

Much like her father and uncle, Andrea has earned a reputation among colleagues as a pragmatic, commonsense lawyer. Meighan Harmon, also an income partner at Schiller, says Andrea’s approach to her work was apparent the very first time they worked together.

Harmon was then a young lawyer working at a different family law firm and was representing a client divorcing one of Andrea’s clients. After Harmon requested a mountain of documents to prepare for the case, she says, Andrea called her out of the blue.

“She introduced herself and said, ‘I want to meet with you to talk about the issues of the case.’ I was taken aback,” Harmon recalls. “I said, ‘I’m not sure I can do that before I get my documents.’ She said, ‘I understand, but before you go on a wild goose chase, I think it might help.’ So I did, and we settled the case fairly quickly and amiably. She’s not afraid to throw out a creative idea.”

Andrea and her husband, Michael, have two teenage children, and Andrea says it’s been tricky to balance her career while also carving out enough time for them. But to many of the younger women at the firm, Harmon says, Andrea’s example as a full-time attorney and mother has been inspirational.

“We’re really the first generation to have kids and keep working,” Harmon says. “Andrea has a phenomenal practice, and she also has two fantastic kids.”

Coming Together as a Family

As Andrea’s legal career continues to blossom, Allan and Arthur have both stepped down in recent years from a managing role at their respective firms, devoting more time to their community interests. Allan’s resume boasts a long list

of positions at bold-name organizations, including stints as chairman and president of the Lyric Opera. These days, education is his major focus through his work as chairman of the board of directors for the Noble Network of Charter Schools.

“I always thought education was important, and once I became aware of the concept of charter schools, I concluded that the expansion of the charter school system was the best and possibly the only way to educate students within big cities,” Allan says.

Allan talks about the network of high schools like a proud parent, pointing out that the three Noble schools that taught juniors last year snagged the top three spots among all of Chicago’s open enrollment schools for junior ACT scores. Last fall, the network of schools expanded to include Muchin College Prep, a campus in downtown Chicago partially endowed by Allan and his family.

“It does feel funny to walk into a school and everybody’s wearing a shirt with your name on it,” Allan says. “We’re very proud of it.”

Arthur is also thinking about getting involved in the charter school movement through KIPP, a national network of schools that’s just now growing in the Chicago area. But for the most part, Arthur says, he has preferred to take a more grassroots approach to community service. Over the years, he has sat on his local temple and synagogue boards, served on Highland Park’s Human Relations Commission and on committees for the Jewish United Fund, and remained active with the American Jewish Committee.

“I wanted to be in smaller organizations where you could make an immediate impact,” he says.

Andrea has followed that same philosophy, using most of her free time to volunteer at her children’s schools. With limited time to spend, she says, she wanted her involvement to be something that would enhance her time with her kids, not chip away at it.

“I wanted to be there in my free time, and I love the place,” she says. “Now that my kids are getting a little older, I’m looking for what’s next, but I’m [always] doing [something] extra.”

And of course, there’s no shortage of family functions to keep the Muchins together. Elaine has taken over for Allan’s mother as the family’s cheerleader, hosting holidays at her and Allan’s home and encouraging everyone to keep in touch. Whether they’re all at an event at the children’s school or planning a vacation, family comes first.

“It doesn’t happen that much today, if you think about it,” Arthur says. “The grandparents are all here, and that is unique, I think, in terms of families. There’s a lot of support.”

And that’s just the way Allan and Arthur’s mother would have wanted it. ■