

“I’d Like to be a Lawyer”

By Cliff Collins

Ray Heysell did not grow up dreaming of becoming an attorney. Born in Vancouver, Wash., he and his family moved several times when Heysell’s father was working for Kaiser Shipbuilding Co. But from the third grade on, Heysell grew up in Medford, where his dad was a partner in a car dealership.

“When I was in school, my parents always assumed I would go into the car business,” he says. After graduating from high school he attended the University of Arizona and Lewis & Clark College, earning a B.S. degree in business. After college he worked a short time in the family business and a year in a Las Vegas casino. He then moved to Portland, planning on working for a year before deciding his future plans. However, two weeks before Lewis & Clark hosted its first day law school class, he met with the dean and said, “I’d like to be a lawyer.” He got accepted, and also landed a 20-hour-a-week job working in the law library. The three-year gap between the end of college and starting law school had been a boon to him in getting his law degree.

A transformative experience for him had been a six-week trip between his sophomore and junior years of college. He accompanied his Presbyterian minister and a group of others on a mission to southeast Asia, visiting Vietnam, Laos, Taiwan, the Philippines and Hong Kong. It was a life-changing for him, he remembers. “We saw great poverty and great wealth, saw people at their best and at their worst.”

“I’d Like to be a Lawyer”

“A Model Citizen”

After passing the bar in 1973, Heysell landed a position with the Bend firm that is now Karnopp Peterson, where he practiced for two years. He returned to Medford in 1975, joining the firm that today is Hornecker Cowling. The firm’s size has varied over the years, from a dozen attorneys up to 20 after a merger, and now consists of 14. Heysell managed and co-managed the firm for many years. The last few years have seen a number of the original partners pass away or retire. “John Hanson and myself are the last of the old guard in my firm,” Heysell says. “The younger partners are better lawyers than we were and are doing a terrific job. I firmly believe the firm has a great future.”

His practice has centered on workers’ compensation defense, as well as representing businesses’ other needs such as OSHA, employment matters, real estate and transactions.

Heysell, an AV-rated attorney, also has been active in the community, serving on the boards of the Jackson County Chamber of Commerce and Sacred Heart School, and as a board member and chair of Asante health system. “I’ve learned from each one of these experiences and enjoyed them, and hopefully made a difference,” he says.

Indeed he has, confirms April L. Sevcik of Medford, who has served on local boards with Heysell and is a public member of the OSB’s disciplinary board. “He’s given so much of his time to the public sector,” she says. “He gives away hour after hour of work, and our community is better for it.”

Jim Wright, a retired Medford businessman who served on Asante’s large board when Heysell chaired it, says Heysell’s approach to lead-

Continued on next page

“I’d Like to be a Lawyer”

continued from page 21

ership is to seek “the greater good. He seems to always want to do what’s best for the most people. It might not be exactly what he wants but what is better for the group.” Wright also has known Heysell through his legal work, as Wright headed a construction company that sometimes faced workers’ comp issues in which Heysell represented the company. “He’s certainly watching out for the interests of the employer, but he also watches out to make sure the interests of the employee are taken care of,” Wright observes.

Sevcik adds that Heysell blends the perfect combination of character traits of an ideal attorney. “He stands high in my mind of what we hope lawyers will be,” she says. “Thoughtful” is the salient adjective for her about him: “He always thinks before he talks, and he tries to find a solution to the problem. He’s a good leader, the kind of guy you that you want in your corner.”

“He is what I always wanted to be as an attorney,” says Roger Ousey, a claimants’ lawyer who represents injured workers and has faced Heysell as opposing counsel often for over two decades. “He views the law as a noble profession and expects people will comport themselves that way.” Ousey says Heysell exemplifies “the Medford way” in demonstrating civility, honest dealings and collegiality, and in helping younger attorneys.

“Ray has always had the benefit of the highest reputation, on both a professional and personal level,” says retired Medford lawyer Bob Cowling, Heysell’s longest-time law partner. “He’s a model citizen. He’s someone you can always count on.”

Ray and Dawn Heysell raised two sons: Scott, who is married to Tania and lives in

“I’d Like to be a Lawyer”

Virginia with two children, and Mark and his wife, Erin, who reside in Alaska.

Despite the commute each way of four and a half hours, Heysell has been active with the OSB for a number of years, serving in leadership posts. He has been a member and chairman of the Workers’ Compensation Section and a member of the Uniform Civil Jury Instruction Committee. He also has been a member and chair of the Professional Responsibility Board. “I felt fortunate to become chairman,” he says. Bob Cowling from his firm had held that post in the past. Heysell sees the Professional Responsibility Board as an essential function of the bar. “If we’re going to be self-governing, our discipline of ourselves is one of the most important things we do. So I took that job very seriously.”

Heysell says he has enjoyed getting to know the people and staff associated with the OSB, adding that his wife, Dawn, is “good with people” and has been supportive of his bar work. “I don’t know if I would be able to undertake the job of president if she was not by my side.”

In his spare time, Heysell’s favorite recreational activity — which he calls “my passion” — is fly-fishing. He and his fishing buddies angle for trout in different parts of the Pacific Northwest, northwest Canada and parts of California. “I do this in an afternoon or on longer, more extended trips,” he says. “I can make it technically serious, competitive, something almost spiritual or just go out and enjoy being outdoors. It’s really enjoyable and relaxing.”

No matter how serious Heysell remains about waking up bar members as to the need to adapt to the changing environment, he also has one other objective for his presidential year: “to have a lot of fun.” ■