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Pat Dunn and his father, Bill, enjoy getting together at the annual Barristers' Christmas Party. Pat Dunn was president of the club in 2005-06.

The Dunn Duo: Father and Son Are Lawyers With Very Different Careers

By Andy Roberts
The Daily Record

If one Dunn is good, two must be even better, right?

Bill and Pat Dunn are Omaha attorneys, not in the same firm, but well-known members of the Omaha Bar Association nonetheless.

Their professional careers didn't start out with the idea of being attorneys, in fact the senior Dunn began his adult life in a newsroom in front of a typewriter.

William Dunn was born in Lead, S.D., in the Black Hills area, not far from Deadwood. His resume includes some work in the mines and some time in the U.S. military. "I was a musician in the Army band," he will tell you.

He went to Colorado U. for journalism school and worked four years at the *Omaha World-Herald* after a short newspaper stint in the early 1950s in Casper, Wyo. After attending law school he was able to move over to Gross & Welch since some of the partners there knew the folks from the *World-Herald*. "It made an easy transition," the elder Dunn said. The transition was made possible by the death of John McKenzie, a member of the firm who was killed in a 1963 plane crash.

What once was a firm of eight attorneys now numbers 25. "I've seen it grow," Bill Dunn said.

Pat Dunn graduated from Creighton Prep and in 1989 earned a BSBA in corporate finance from UNL. Three years later he had his J.D. from the University of Nebraska College of Law.

He went to work as a deputy county attorney in Hall County, then Platte County and Douglas County, leaving the final position on Jan. 1, 1998, to hang out his own shingle. Pat says he would be "nowhere" without the people and the experiences he gained in those years.

"I was a sole practitioner specializing in the defense of criminal cases for over eleven years before going into partnership with my long-time friend Dan Stockmann, who spent over 10 years in the Douglas County public defender's office."

Dunn & Stockmann now is a legal partnership specializing in the defense of criminal matters. Martha Wharton, Pat's sister, was a law school classmate of Stockmann's at Creighton. She works in the public defender's office, but her story will have to wait.

Pat Dunn is the middle child of five, with an older brother and sister and a younger brother and sister. He doesn't like to talk much about his outside volunteer activities, considering them personal, but admits to enjoying kayaking, learning to play the drums and fly-fishing.

He's not sure if this outside work makes him a better attorney, but: "They're very therapeutic."

His father, Bill, met his wife Jane more than 50 years ago at the old St. Catherine's Hospital (now Bergan Mercy) and says he enjoys staying with his law firm and mentoring younger attorneys. He is less active with Gross & Welch as he nears 80 this year, and keeps his hand in the law with some estate work. "Right now I'm pretty much semi-retired."

Bill enjoys golf, travel and reading, "and then time with the family."

He will tell you he always admired the attorneys in the family, including a cousin who was a judge on the Supreme Court in South Dakota. Turns out, he's not the only one who admitted to family members in the legal profession.

“My dad is the coolest guy I’ve ever known,” Pat Dunn said. “I really never gave much thought to anything else.”

He says some thought was given to medicine, but his mother tells him he never would have put in all the work on the math and science that he would have needed.

“She’s probably right,” he says.

Pat Dunn will tell you his job is easy – he’s Bill Dunn’s son practicing law in Omaha. Modestly, he’ll say other people’s fondness for his father helped land him the job – a mysterious opening on the Douglas County attorney’s staff appeared in 1995 just after then-Deputy County Attorney Don Kleine first told him another opening was filled.

“I remain convinced of two things,” Pat Dunn said. “One: Someone told Don I was Bill Dunn’s son; and, Two: It wasn’t my dad that told him. He didn’t know I was trying to get the job. That’s how highly people think of my dad.”

The younger Dunn, 44, also modestly plays down any significance to the practice he has built, saying he’s not “big civil law firm material.” He does admit that he and Stockmann, 37, have a good practice and lots of experience in defense work, having been on the other side of numerous homicide prosecutions.

“We have both tried far more than our share of homicides and other serious cases for guys our ages,” he said. “I’m convinced that there is just no substitute for experience.”

Dunn currently is working with Jerry Hug and represents Roy Ellis who was convicted of the Amber Harris homicide. The 12-year-old girl was missing for months before her body was found in Hummel Park in May of 2006. “That matter is currently under review by the Nebraska Supreme Court,” Dunn said.

Bill Dunn will tell you he appreciates the fellowship of the attorneys with whom he has worked and sees that as one of his biggest rewards. Pat says he tries to stay humble, heeding his father’s warning against the dangers of becoming “a big shot” as that usually comes before a fall. He does know that when a judge needs to appoint an attorney to represent a defendant in a particularly heinous murder, his name is on the short list to be called.

“That’s gratifying,” he said.

Both Duns are active members in the Omaha Bar Association, and while his father is easing into retirement, Pat Dunn admits applying for a spot on the bench has crossed his mind.

“But then again, I also considered a career in stand-up comedy after my Barristers’ monologue the year I was president,” he jokes. “A guy can dream, can’t he?”

And tell stories, as you may have guessed. No visit with the Duns is complete without a couple of smiles, courtesy of their great Irish wit.

These two come from Pat; first, the story of the sandwich at Barrett's Barleycorn that carries his name.

Pat, you see, lost his left eye in an accident when he was 6 years old. Now, his favorite haunt is the Irish Pub known as Barrett's Barleycorn on 43rd and Leavenworth in Omaha, where a staple of the menu has been a sandwich called the One Eyed Mick.

"It has ham and cheese and eggs and mayo ... it's awesome, but don't let your internal medicine specialist know you ate it," Pat Dunn says. "He won't be happy with you."

His "irascible" friend from the public defender's office, Bill Harry, used to cross out One Eyed Mick and write in Pat Dunn on all the menus. (For those who don't know, Mick is slang for an Irishman). It got to the point where Pat regularly heard random customers asking: "Who is this Pat Dunn guy?"

The Barretts apparently decided it was time for a change.

"So Frank and [his daughter] Karen Barrett, I assume more out of an interest to save money at the print shop than for any other reason, just renamed the sandwich," Pat says. "The menu now reads 'Pat Dunn (F.K.A. One Eyed Mick).'"

"The funny part is that, months after the new menus were printed, the staff was still asking me 'Why did they name *that* sandwich after you? You *never* order that.'"

We'll close with an attorney-related story.

Pat's first client as a defense attorney burglarized the Sutherland's Lumber in South Omaha, taking only a chainsaw – which, of course was needed to cut into the roof of a Family Dollar Store the next night.

"Of course that makes sense, because professional burglars don't go through windows or doors because they have alarm system sensors on them," Pat explains. "You cut a hole in the roof and get in that way."

The next night this individual was on the roof of the Family Dollar Store with his new chainsaw and cuts a hole in the roof.

"In classic Wyle E. Coyote fashion, however, he pivoted around his own body while cutting the hole," Dunn said. "As he was finishing the last cut, the roof gave way under his feet and he fell through the hole landing on a desk and breaking his leg.

"The saw came through the hole behind him and hit him in the head, cutting his head open and knocking him out."

The next morning, the store's employees arrived to open for business and found him laying in a pool of his own blood and screaming at them to call a squad.

“It gets better,” Dunn promises. “In spite of being caught red-handed, he insisted we had a meritorious defense. After all, he was physically unable to scale the 8-foot chain link fence at Sutherland’s, let alone climb to the roof of the Family Dollar Store, as he had been shot in the rear end during a previous attempt to escape from official confinement.”

The client became irate with Pat – “actually, I was laughing so hard I couldn’t breathe” – when he refused to believe that the gunshot wound had rendered the client “a quadriplegic in his left leg.”

“Yes, it’s a true story.”

And now, we are done with the Dunns – two Omaha Bar Association members you need to know.

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