



LONG AND WINDING ROAD

Varied experiences ultimately lead Goudie to paralegal work

By Erika Strebel

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Before John Goudie found his niche in paralegal work, he had a variety of experiences.

In addition to earning his associate's, undergraduate and graduate degrees, Goudie had worked as a licensed EMT, an orderly and a licensed chauffeur. He also went to nursing school and worked the night shift at UPS for about five years.

Goudie got his first paralegal job with a law firm shortly after graduating from Concordia University's paralegal-certification program.

But his useful experiences didn't end there. The firm eventually had him obtain a license to represent people in workers' compensation cases.

Goudie's most memorable case involved a client who survived being pulled into a machine at a paper mill in a town in northern Wisconsin. Although the client recovered physically, her mental scars were so severe, she vowed to never set foot in the town again.

In the end, Goudie got her employer to provide her with enough money to move to Milwaukee and return to school. The client later became a medical assistant and had a family.

"She was really a great success story based on how the case played out well," Goudie said. "It's hard to prove PTSD. It's tougher to prove that someone couldn't even be in the town. It



STAFF PHOTO BY KEVIN HARNACK

was a great case; she was a great client."

Now a litigation paralegal at Milwaukee-based Gimbel, Reilly, Guerin & Brown, Goudie works with lawyers at the firm primarily to provide legal defense for healthcare providers appearing before state and federal licensing agencies.

"I like the diversity," Goudie said. "Even though the cases are very similar in nature, there's always little quirks and twists and turns that make it different. I enjoy the camaraderie, the interaction.

We have some great legal minds here. They just boggle you sometimes with how smart they are."

Outside his work, Goudie enjoys traveling with his wife and spending time with his grandchildren. He is on the board of directors of the Wauwatosa Historical Society, and Goudie and his wife spend some of their time at the oldest post office in Milwaukee County, Wauwatosa's Little Red Store. He and his wife run the committee that oversees the office. [W.L.J.](#)

GETTING TO KNOW GOUDIE

Wisconsin Law Journal: Tell me about a misconception that the general public has about the work that you do.

John Goudie: The public believes that paralegals can give them legal advice – and you can't. Good paralegals know that. ... The other is that there's the public belief that paralegals are a notch above legal assistants. ... I think we're striving to get to that point where there is that tiered system because we need our legal assistants. But the big thing is that there is still — to this day and probably into the future — no mandato-

ry training to be a paralegal. So the public believes we're the highly-educated trained individuals, but in many cases, we're not.

W.L.J.: Tell me about someone who has affected the way you do your work.

J.G.: Probably Martin R. Stein, who was the first attorney I worked for. He was a seasoned attorney at the time and did a lot of medical malpractice on the federal level. He really taught me the skills that I needed for research, file organization, file management, trial preparation and witness statements. He really taught it all to me. He really was my mentor.

W.L.J.: You've been pushing for the statewide licensing of paralegals for more than 20 years. The bar finally launched a voluntary certification program for paralegals earlier this year. How does it feel to be so close to achieving your goal?

J.G.: Validating. It is not what we set out to obtain in 1994, but I'm very thrilled. I think it's going to be more important as time goes on. It took a long time for attorneys to realize this could be an advantage – to have a format or pattern or template to measure capabilities. [W.L.J.](#)