

Karnes courts success for his new firm of Gimbel, Reilly, Guerin & Brown

By: MaryBeth Matzek, Special to the Wisconsin Law Journal ☉ November 22, 2016 9:58 am



Russell Karnes (Staff photo by Kevin Harnack)

While some attorneys rarely see the inside of a courtroom, that has never been a problem for Russell Karnes.

Since graduating from Marquette Law School in 2010, he's amassed thousands of hours of courtroom experience.

"Working with clients and helping them solve their problems gives me a lot of satisfaction," said Karnes, a business and real estate litigator with Gimbel, Reilly, Guerin & Brown in Milwaukee. "When I graduated law school I worked with a creditors rights firm and got a lot of experience quickly. I was in court all the time. I enjoy going to court and being around judges."

While he may no longer in court everyday, that experience definitely benefits his clients at the Milwaukee-based firm.

"My practice is now more of a mix of in-office and court work and it is a nice balance to have," Karnes said. "I like being able to connect with small businesses and handling some of their concerns."

While Karnes focuses on helping clients solve their problems, he admitted they do not always like the answers he provides.

"Sometimes the solutions are not easy, but you have to work with your client and help them work through it," said Karnes, who estimated he's had court appearances in nearly all of Wisconsin's 72 counties.

After Karnes received his bachelor's degree in history, he enrolled in Marquette Law School's part-time program. While there, he worked at a law firm, which provided a lot of hands-on work.

"It was great to take what I was learning and see it in action," Karnes said. "It was an amazing experience and I am glad I had those opportunities."

Wisconsin Law Journal: What makes your work important to you?

Russell Karnes: The most important thing I do in my work is help my clients through their problems in our legal

system. I think that like most lawyers, I am inclined to wanting to help people. Lawyers are in a unique position because we often interact with people during the most challenging problems of their lives. To guide our clients through these problems we must balance our roles as both client representatives and officers of the court. We must also treat the opposing party with dignity and respect. Providing competent representation often means helping clients confront the realities of their position in our adversarial legal system.

WLJ: Who is your hero in the legal field?

Karnes: Michelle Obama, because she found balance as a lawyer, mom and First Lady.

WLJ: What do you do outside of work to deal with stress from the office?

Karnes: The time I spend with my wife and three young daughters keeps me grounded and helps put work stress in perspective.

WLJ: What's one thing many people get wrong about what you do?

Karnes: Many non-lawyers don't realize how much time goes into a case before trial. If you watch lawyers on television you usually see them show up at court and destroy their opponent with one improvised gotcha question. But if you're improvising in court, it usually means that you're either underprepared, performing poorly or both.

WLJ: What's your favorite memory from law school?

Karnes: When my family came to see me get sworn-in at the Wisconsin Supreme Court.

WLJ: Is there a certain case that stands out to you?

Karnes: For better or for worse, the cases that stand out are the ones that result in lessons learned. My first trial, for example, ended with a judgment in my client's favor, but also a surprise judgment against my client on a counterclaim. The counterclaim judgment was significantly reduced on a motion to reconsider. But those are the cases that keep you on your toes.