

Springfield's Bruce Beeman and Son Brent of Wolter Beeman & Lynch



By Josh Weinhold

SPRINGFIELD — For Brent A. Beeman, the signs were always there. If the record jury verdicts his father was winning weren't enough to convince him to be a lawyer, the legacy of another prominent Springfield attorney underscored the benefits of practicing law.

"Growing up in the hometown of Abraham Lincoln certainly puts that in your mind at an early age," Brent says.

Despite all of Lincoln's accomplishments, however, Brent's true model for what it meant to be a member of the legal profession was at home. Today, Brent works at **Wolter, Beeman & Lynch**, the firm his father, Bruce A. Beeman, co-founded in 1997.

As he was growing up, Brent was well aware of the work his forebear was doing on behalf of members of the community as a plaintiff personal injury lawyer. There was simply no way of avoiding it.

"People would come up to me in the street when they saw that Bruce Beeman was my dad," Brent says. "They'd

tell me how he helped their family or helped them out of a tough spot. In the back of my mind, I always knew that no matter what I did, I wanted to make a positive impact on society."

For Bruce, who became a lawyer in 1975, there was little doubt his son was interested in following in his footsteps. He saw the signs early on.

"I noticed Brent was interested in writing and was very good at putting his thoughts down on paper — that's, of course, one of the essential skills of being an effective lawyer," Bruce says.

When he noticed the potential in his son, he fostered his interest in the law. Brent worked at his father's firm while he was in high school, initially running errands and bringing documents to and from the courthouse. But eventually, Bruce got permission from judges for Brent to sit at the counsel table.

Before he had even started college, Brent was assisting at trials, reading depositions aloud for the court or giving his father advice on jury selection. For Brent, it was a great opportunity. But

it was also practical.

"Mostly, I needed a job," Brent says. "I needed to work somewhere."

Bruce's eldest son had also worked at the law firm while he was in high school. After a while, though, he realized he didn't have much desire for the law.

"Brent was the opposite. He seemed to take more interest in it," Bruce says. "He had more questions about it, seemed to be interested in it and motivated to do that. It just gradually progressed to the point that he decided to go to law school."

After graduating from Creighton University in 2003, Brent enrolled at Southern Illinois University School of Law. He liked the relatively small class size and the opportunity it offered to graduate with a fraction of the debt he'd rack up at other schools.

Plus, he didn't need to go too far from home. Once he earned his J.D., he knew he had a job waiting at his father's firm. And not just because his last name was Beeman.

"It was my idea to bring him here immediately," Bruce says. "Because I think he had a lot of really good qualities that would add to my practice and the practice of the firm."

Returning to Sangamon County to Practice Law

For Brent, there was no fear about returning to Springfield to work.

"The idea was always to

head back home," he says. "I think that the amount of experience that you get early in your career in a smaller community pays dividends the rest of your career. I had major responsibilities on files from Day One here, and that was definitely a selling point on returning to Springfield."

Bruce had a similar experience early in his career. After graduating from The John Marshall Law School in 1975, he worked in Sangamon County as an assistant state's attorney and, later, as an assistant public defender. That meant getting a lot of experience in big cases early on, rather than languishing in minor matters at a big office.

"I think it makes a lot of sense to come to a smaller area and actually get into the entire workload of a practice," he says.

Of course, being a Beeman practicing law in Springfield brought its own set of pressures for Brent.

"Many attorneys who had experience with my dad mentioned, 'Well, I hope you're as good as your dad,'" he says. "So I felt a little bit like if Babe Ruth's son had decided to go into baseball. I realized you have to be yourself and you have to make your own way."

He means that literally, too. He intentionally set out to find a type of work he could hone in on that his dad didn't do. He chose workers' compensation, in part because he could learn

Leading LawyersSM

Find a better lawyer, fasterSM

LeadingLawyers.com

that practice area from the two other partners at the firm, Randall A. Wolter and Francis J. Lynch.

“It was vital early in my career that I be a little different than my dad,” he says. “I wouldn’t want my dad to essentially do all my work for me.”

Even though he had been by his dad’s side at trials as a teenager, he didn’t learn all Bruce’s tips and tricks back then. There was still much to pick up after he passed the bar — especially that there’s no substitute for preparation.

“You’ve got to know your case inside and out, really invest the time,” Brent says. “I noticed growing up, he spent a lot of time with us, but he also spent a lot of time at work, and outworking the other side is nine-tenths of it.”

There were other lessons, too. Treat clients with respect. Always return phone calls. Keep your client informed of what’s going on. But, more than anything, prepare, prepare, prepare.

“I noticed that his preparation prior to trial makes the trial experience run much more smoothly,” Brent says. “He’ll know with every question the response that will usually be elicited. Very little at trial ends up being a surprise.”

Bruce has learned things from Brent, as well. Various aspects of technology, for instance. Or the benefits of keeping a detailed activity log on cases, so that if something happens to him,

someone can pick up a file and immediately have a good idea of what’s going on.

Now, father and son have their offices right next to each other, so they’re constantly communicating on matters. They’ve attended mediations together, been in the same room during settlement negotiations and handled trials together.

The law books Brent remembers seeing his dad use at his office are now mostly for decoration, but they still surround him as they work late preparing for a case. Based on his work so far, Bruce sees many good things ahead for Brent.

“He’ll have no problem,” Bruce says. “He’s already as good as I am — if not better.”

Father and son practicing law together isn’t just a great professional arrangement. It’s a great personal one, too.

“We’ve always been great friends, so it’s nice to see him every day,” Brent says. “It’s good to like the people and work well with the people you work with. We certainly have that.”