

# RANDY WOLTER

## Success Through Professionalism

by Bethany Krajelis

SPRINGFIELD—It's not uncommon for Randall A. Wolter to go the extra mile, whether in his professional or personal life.

Like many lawyers, golfing is one of Wolter's favorite hobbies. And he's pretty good at it, too. His handicap hovers around eight or nine, though it's been as low as four.

But unlike most lawyers who enjoy walking the course or hitting the range in their free time, Wolter, a founding member of **Wolter, Beeman & Lynch** in Springfield, took his hobby a step further. He developed a pair of golf courses.

About two decades ago, Wolter teamed up with two Springfield businessmen to create Panther Creek Country Club, a development

hobbies are dwindling," Wolter says. "The practice of law has become my hobby as well as my profession these days."

And just like his golf handicap indicates that he has a solid swing, his legal stats show he's more than skilled in the game of law. In the past 25 years, Wolter, who focuses his practice in personal injury, professional malpractice and workers' compensation, has obtained more than \$45 million for his clients.

### Following the Law

Wolter has been interested in the law since childhood, when he listened to stories about the profession from his two great uncles, both of whom practiced law in Chicago.

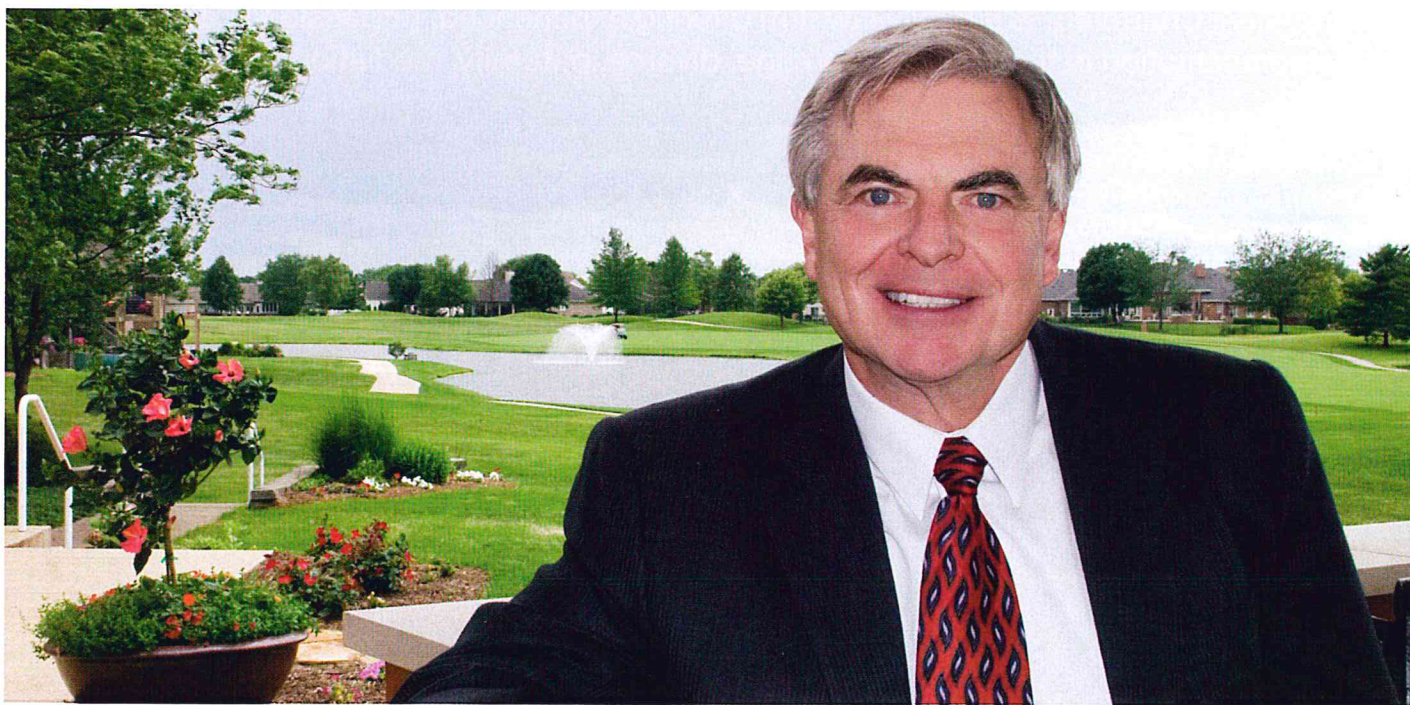
to knock law school out in about two years. To help pay for his legal degree, Wolter worked as a waiter for a college sorority, a job that came with the perk of free meals, and as a bartender at Dooley's, a popular college hangout.

"It was the best job in the world," he says.

He made some decent tips and more importantly, met his wife, Gale, while tending bar.

While Wolter worked hard to become a lawyer, he was unsure of what kind of law he wanted to practice once he graduated and passed the bar in 1973.

Wolter's first job out of law school was as a lawyer for Trans Union Corporation in Chicago, where he handled complex leasing agreements, developed contracts for retailers and reporting



that features an 18-hole championship golf course that has played home to the LPGA State Farm Classic since 2007. He was also involved in the development of Black Bear Golf Club, which opened in 1995 just outside of Orlando, Fla.

"Now that I'm 61 years old, my physical

Once he had his mind set on the field, Wolter didn't waste much time working toward his goal. After he graduated from Northern Illinois University with a political science degree in 1971, he went to the University of Illinois-College of Law in Champaign.

With the help of summer classes, he was able

agencies in the credit business and represented the company in a number of civil litigation matters.

"It was fun, but I recognized early on that the people who had more interesting jobs were on the business side," Wolter says. "They were the ones traveling, (Continued on Page 106)



(Continued from Page 104) negotiating and having dinners and we [lawyers] would go back to drafting.”

With a desire to get more involved on the business side of things, Wolter took advantage of his company’s offer to pay for business school. He worked during the day and went to night school at the University of Chicago, earning a Master’s of Business Administration in 1979.

It didn’t take too long for others to notice Wolter’s dedication and work ethic.

Within a few years at Trans Union and before he graduated from business school, Wolter was recruited by Continental Bank to work in its litigation department. Because federal banking laws required complaints against banks to be filed in the county it was located, Wolter handled more than 200 cases for the bank that dealt with a variety of matters from bounced checks to multi-million loans.

“It was good experience,” he says. “There were always a lot of lawsuits.”

### Taking a Detour

While Wolter initially planned to leave the legal profession when he earned his MBA, he ended up sticking around the bank to interview for a position on then-Gov. James R. Thompson’s cabinet.

On August 1, 1979, Wolter was hired as the executive director of the Commission on Economic Development. The move was consistent with “wanting to be on the fun side of business” and one that required him to make recommendations on a variety of issues affecting the state’s economy ranging from banking to workers’ compensation.

Although Wolter planned to return to his job at Continental Bank when his two-year state stint ended, he and his wife liked Springfield so much that they never went back.

He eventually returned to the law, forming a partnership with Robert E. Stine, who, at that time, was general counsel for the Illinois Chiropractic Society. Stein handled administrative law matters, and Wolter focused his practice on personal injury law.

“It was fun,” he says. “But, I learned very quickly that you have to have a certain type of personality to do personal injury work because you’re not getting a regular paycheck. You don’t make a nickel unless you help somebody.”

Luckily for Wolter, his practice is more stable these days. He’s had more than two decades to build up his client list and in 1997, teamed up with Springfield lawyers, Bruce A. Beeman and Francis J. Lynch, to form Wolter, Beeman & Lynch.

The firm almost exclusively handles personal injury, workers’ comp and medical and legal

malpractice matters. Wolter spends about half of his time working on personal injury cases, 30 percent on workers’ comp and 20 percent on malpractice matters.

### Building Relationships

A typical day for Wolter starts about 7:30 a.m., when he gets into the office and on the phone.

“I’m not a big fan of e-mail,” he says. “I think it’s a real inefficient way to do business, so I spend more time on the phone.”

Talking, not typing, is what really builds relationships, he says. And having relationships with his clients, as well as attorneys, is the part of the job that Wolter likes best.

It’s also what he excels at and what makes him such a professional, colleagues say.

“He has great relationships with his opponents,” Beeman says. “I think that’s his strong suit.”

By having those relationships, Wolter can reach agreements with opposing counsel in order to reach a speedy resolution for his clients, Beeman says.

Richard H. Narup is one of several area defense attorneys who frequently face Wolter in litigation. Narup, with Drake Narup & Mead, has at least one or two cases against Wolter at any given time.

“He fights the battles that need to be fought and doesn’t engage in the unnecessary ones,” he says. “He doesn’t fight to just fight.”

Narup also appreciates Wolter’s honesty.

“He takes a realistic view of what a case is worth. Some attorneys don’t,” he says. “He has a good idea of the strengths and weakness of his case and is always straight forward about it.”

Wolter says being honest is an important ingredient to building relationships.

“One nice thing about practicing in Springfield as opposed to Chicago is I know the dozen people in town who deal with the issue of getting medical bills paid,” he says. “I want them to trust me so I can call them and say, ‘You’ve got this bill for \$10,000. I’ve got a case with real liability issues and a client that a jury may not like. Would you take this amount? Or tell me what you want to take.’”

He tries to present all of the facts to opposing attorneys so they have the information necessary to make their own decisions. After all, he says, “If you try to shove it down their throat, they’re never going to talk to you again, especially if they think you’re fibbing.”

Fredrick P. Velde, an insurance defense attorney with Heyl Royster in Springfield, says if he had to describe Wolter in one word, it would be “professional.”

“He’s very prepared and knows personal

injury work so it’s easy to get to the ultimate solution quicker with Randy, whether we are going to try a case or settle it,” Velde says. “If someone knows what they are doing, which he definitely does, it helps you get to the bottom line a lot quicker.”

### Helping Clients

Not only is Wolter professional with the attorneys he works with, but he’s a pro when it comes to working with clients, his law partner says.

“He’s very patient and level-headed with his clients,” Beeman says. “He’s a good lawyer.”

It’s rewarding to help clients, but it’s not always easy in personal injury cases because there’s really no way to make an injured person whole again, Wolter says.

“No case is perfect. There’s always some reason they ought to be happy to take less than 100 percent and that’s because the value of the case is totally different than what is going to make you whole again,” he says. “We really can’t make them whole, so all we can do is try to get the most we can for them.”

While it can be tough, he believes the hard work is worth it if he can hand his clients a check in the end or at least solve their problem.

“I look at my role here as helping people get out of the jams that were created through no fault of their own,” he says.

Several years ago, Wolter took on an unusual and intriguing case for a Jacksonville woman who called him for help. She told him there was a man with the Church of God in Georgia who was threatening to take away the church she went to.

Wolter says the man showed up at the woman’s church, which was affiliated with the Georgia church, and asked members of the congregation if they believed it was possible to speak in tongues. When some of them said they did, the man told them he was taking over their church because it was out of concert with the beliefs of the Church of God.

Because the matter didn’t fall within his area of expertise, Wolter went to a pastor to learn more about the church. The pastor gave him four of five books, which helped him figure out that the church didn’t have a dogma.

“Speaking in tongues was not contrary to any rule of the church, so the guy just made all this up,” he says. “He had no basis whatsoever to take the church away from them.”

Wolter took that information to the local title company and told them that if the church was going to be sold, the current owners, not the man from Georgia, would be the ones selling it.

“They swear they were sent to me by God,” Wolter says. “It was nice to be able to help them.” ■