

Ray Massucci

Tireless Advocate in Northwest Suburban Family Law Cases

by Paul Dailing

ARLINGTON HEIGHTS — On a stretch of Northwest Highway in a converted saloon just southeast of the Arlington Racetrack, by a park and near the former high school, Raymond R. Massucci of **Massucci, Blomquist, Anderson & Dunn**, sits at his desk.

On the walls behind him are the normal law office accoutrements — awards, diplomas, golf paraphernalia. But the wall also contains courtroom sketches from one of Massucci's most famous cases, which went to the Illinois Supreme Court.

Massucci had been appointed guardian ad litem for the children of the family, the heirs to a large national chain. The contentious, bitter case went on for eight years, during which time both of the parents overdosed.

Massucci's law partner of 37 years, Ernest Blomquist, remembers how hard Massucci fought for the rights of the children he represented.

"He was at the top of his game. He was here night and day," Blomquist says. "He never lost sight of who his client was and what was at stake."

For Massucci, the best reward came long after the case concluded: He still hears from the grandparents every year with updates on the now-successful, happy and healthy children.

"With divorce cases, you have personal rapport with the people and you hear from them from time to time," Massucci says. "I have another lady I represented about 20 years ago. She sends me a Christmas card every year with a picture of her son."

This dedication to his clients' success in life rather than to winning courtroom squabbles has earned the esteem of his peers.

"I think that he's certainly one of the admired lawyers in the bar," says Anna Markley Bush, partner at Barrington-based Bush & Heise, Attorneys at Law, and a member of the Northwest Suburban Bar Association Board of Governors.

She has been facing off against Massucci since 1977. She praises Massucci for never battling for the battle's sake, although he is a force to be reckoned with in the courtroom.

"He is a zealous advocate, yet practical



and (exercising) common sense,” Bush says. “Every time there’s a problem, instead of filing a motion we can call each other and talk about it.”

Charles Fleck of Chicago-based Schiller DuCanto & Fleck says divorce cases have the potential to become “mortal combat between husband and wife” where things like businesses, practicality, even the best interests of the couple’s own children can often fall by the wayside. But not with Massucci, Fleck says.

“He’s got a good way of getting through the emotional garbage, grabbing the client and getting them to focus on what’s important,” Fleck says.

The two met about 30 years ago, when Massucci argued a case before the then-judge. Massucci impressed Fleck as an honest, diligent litigator, an opinion only strengthened in the years since.

“You could pretty well tell that what he was going to tell you was on the money, not a lot of spin and overstatement,” Fleck says.

That’s part of the reason Blomquist decided to join up with Massucci nearly 40 years ago.

“His standard is fight hard and fight fair,” Blomquist says.

Air Force to Law

Massucci was born in Chicago, although his parents moved to Skokie when he attended St. John’s Military Academy in Delafield, Wis., for high school.

“My father thought being a lawyer would be the greatest thing ever, and he encouraged me to go to law school,” Massucci says.

His father, a contractor, was born in the United States, but Massucci’s grandmother moved the family back to Italy when his father was very young.

“He came back here in ’13. He was educated in Italy, wasn’t educated here, and still spoke with an Italian accent,” Massucci says. “He thought law was a good business to be in, a nice profession to protect people, to help people in need of help.”

After graduating from St. John’s, Massucci went to Drake University, leaving his military schooling and Reserve Officers’ Training Corps training behind. Or so he thought.

“When I went to Drake from St. John’s, I didn’t get involved in ROTC until my junior year when I decided I wanted to go to law school, and I knew I was eligible for the draft,” he says.

After graduating from John Marshall Law School in 1969, he took a commission with the United States Air Force. He was

stationed at Offutt Air Force Base near Omaha, Neb., the headquarters of the now-defunct Strategic Air Command, which handled much of the nation’s nuclear capabilities during the Cold War.

He was in the Judge Advocates Office for the 3902nd Air Base Wing, doing primarily criminal work, both in defense and as a prosecutor.

In 1974, he returned to Chicago and started a practice with an old college friend — his pledge son in their fraternity, incidentally. The friend introduced him to Blomquist, who joined the practice in 1976.

“We were two young guys starting out, and we found out we had the same standards and the same interests, and we went from there,” Blomquist recalls. “It’s been a good marriage.”

The two shared the same values and ideals for what the law should be. Those standards have stayed strong in Massucci over the years, Blomquist says.

“He holds the standards for his opponents high, makes them have to do their job. He holds judges to a high

“He’s honest. He’s prepared. He does whatever he can for his clients.”

standard, makes them do their job to the ultimate,” Blomquist says. “He’s honest. He’s prepared. He does whatever he can for his clients.”

Suburban Law

While many people who picture Illinois law firms have visions of the Chicago River and glass-and-steel skyscrapers, Massucci soon found something counterintuitive: More of his business was coming from Arlington Heights than Chicago.

“I had an office down in 10 South LaSalle in 1974 with my original partners, and we had a small office at Arlington Heights, the second floor at 9 East Campbell, which is now an apartment. We started generating all the business out in the suburbs, so we rented a bigger space and then we bought this place in ’79,” Massucci says of the converted saloon on Northwest Highway.

Massucci and Blomquist parted ways with their former partners in order to focus on the suburbs, which had not yet seen the explosive growth of the 1980s.

“A lot of these towns that you think of as big areas were really just little towns —

Schaumburg, Hoffman Estates, Arlington Heights,” Blomquist says.

Building relationships within the soon-to-boom communities proved a prescient move for the firm. They now handle cases throughout Lake, Cook, DuPage and McHenry counties.

“Our hourly rate is a bit cheaper than the silk-stocking downtown divorce firms,” Massucci says. “We’re experienced, and we can give, we think, the same quality of service.”

Part of the reason for that is practical. Lawyers charge for time and travel, so paying for Chicago attorneys to drive to Rolling Meadows to file with the Third Municipal District, or paying for Massucci to drive to the Daley Center, doesn’t make sense at such a trying emotional and economic time in clients’ lives.

Bush says many clients find they get quicker and more beneficial resolutions from lawyers who don’t have to pay for office space in the Loop glass and steel.

“Our economic needs aren’t the same as people practicing downtown,” she says.

“Our overheads aren’t as high. It allows us to be more creative in our resolutions.”

The members of the suburban bar all know each other and the judges, Bush says. Familiarity has bred advocates as effective at working together as facing off against each other, she says.

There were also personal dividends, Blomquist says. “It allowed us to be dads and husbands effectively, it allowed us to have our practices close by. This was a good market for us,” Blomquist says.

Division of Labor

Like many young lawyers starting out, Massucci took whatever cases came in the door — divorces, DUIs, arranging a plea bargain in 1975 for “the Illinois Enema Bandit,” later made famous in a Frank Zappa song.

But a few years into their practice, he and Blomquist sat down to discuss where they wanted the firm to go. They decided Blomquist, who came from the Cook County State’s Attorney’s Office, would handle the criminal work. Massucci would take the divorce and family law cases.

“I didn’t like the criminal picture that much — I had tried a lot of cases in the service — but I liked litigation,” Massucci says. “There is litigation in the divorce division, which you tried to avoid, but I enjoyed doing it.”

Blomquist says the division of labor has

been a success, allowing them to develop individually while keeping the firm's scope large.

"We covered everything," Blomquist says. "He and I really developed our own specialties and our own reputations."

Massucci says the move proved practical as the suburbs grew and the casework became more prominent and complex.

"You've got to specialize in this business," he says. "If you're in a small town, you can be a general practitioner, but here you really have to specialize, I think, in a metropolitan area such as this."

Family and Future

Massucci met his wife in college at a mixer between his fraternity and her sorority. She was seeing one of his fraternity brothers at the time, but the two soon started dating.

The divorce attorney and his wife have been married 49 years. When he talks about his wife, a retired schoolteacher and breast cancer survivor, he calls her "a remarkable woman."

Neither of their two children went into law, both becoming accountants.

"They worked for me in the summers when they were in high school and in college, and they said, 'Ehh, I don't think we want to be divorce lawyers, Dad,'" Massucci recalls, laughing.

Part of Massucci's reputation comes from the honesty with which he treats both peers and clients, Fleck says.

"He builds up a lot of trust," Fleck says. "When he has to tell a client what they don't want to hear, he just lays it out: 'Here it is.'"

For Massucci's part, he says that's a function of age and experience.

"The older I get, you just take this much more seriously, probably in some instances as seriously as the clients do. You've got to be objective. You are their zealous advocate, but I won't take a position that's not supported by the law. I just won't do it."

"Having Ray as part of the title of my business gives me a lot of pride because I know what he stands for," Blomquist says.

Although he prefers to keep families out of the courtroom, Massucci is known throughout the region as a powerful litigator, the man arguing in the courtroom sketches hanging on his office walls.

"If you need to litigate, have someone who knows how to do it," Massucci says. ■