

SCOTT RICHMOND

Building a Reputation in Both Real Estate Law and Litigation

by Maureen Wilkey

SOUTH ELGIN—When Ariano, Hardy, Ritt, Nyuli, Richmond, Lytle & Goettel Partner Scott G. Richmond accepted his first job out of law school, he didn't think he would still be practicing there more than 20 years later.

Richmond built his home in South Elgin and his practice at what then was the Elgin office. He was guided by a mentor named Al Anderson, who later became a judge. Richmond found that he liked his work at the Elgin- and later South Elgin-based firm.

Now, he's starting to mentor associates of his own at the seven-attorney firm in the far western suburbs.

"This is firm has always had a premier reputation and is highly respected within this community," Richmond says. "I'm always striving to help honor that reputation."

When he first started with the firm, he aspired to uphold the firm's reputation built by the partners, Ralph Hardy, Al Anderson, Frank Ariano, Peter Bazos and William Castillo. Today, his partners Lisa Nyuli, Karrsten Goettel and Aaron Lytle all make that their priority as well. They often work together as a team to meet their clients' needs and further that reputation.

Richmond took a liking to law at an early age when he joined his high school mock trial team during his junior year. He went on to win state championships with that team in his last two years of high school.

Richmond became interested in the business aspects of law, so he went to Michigan State University to earn his bachelor's degree in accounting. He worked in that field as a financial analyst for two years before going on to earn a J.D. with high honors in 1995 from IIT Chicago-Kent College of Law.

Since accepting the job at Ariano Hardy Ritt, he has practiced in a wide variety of areas including civil litigation, banking, zoning and real estate. He built a name for himself throughout the western and northwestern suburbs in 2008 and 2009 by working on dozens of foreclosure and short sale matters, representing both banks and homeowners.

"While some of the zoning transactions and large properties might be the things that stand



out in the public eye, each individual short sale case was important to me," Richmond says.

"It was very gratifying seeing people in different situations be able to get out from being underwater on their homes. They may not want to leave that home. But, at some point, it doesn't make sense to keep paying money into something and not be earning any equity in it."

FOCUSED ON ISSUES, NOT EMOTIONS

In addition to working on foreclosures and short sales, Richmond represents businesses and individuals in civil litigation, investment property purchases and sales, and business sales or acquisitions.

As housing foreclosure issues have waned in the last few years, Richmond has increasingly worked on a larger variety of commercial real estate and business transactions, like

facilitating the purchase of a self-storage facility and working on zoning approvals for gas stations, housing subdivisions, and new retirement facilities that are being built across the suburbs.

While Richmond sees each transaction or case as important to the individuals involved, he is always careful not to get emotionally involved himself, says Timothy Reuland, a partner at Speers Reuland and Cibulskis PC.

Richmond and Reuland are currently working on a complicated case involving business transactions between family members, and Reuland says he likes working with Richmond on the matter because of his ability to separate the family dynamics from the business.

"He keeps the personalities out of the litigation and really focuses on the issues," Reuland says. "Even when things can get emotional, he is able to keep calm and make sense of the issues."

When transactions don't involve family members, Richmond still has a talent for remaining calm and working with both sides to make sure the transaction gets done, says Emir Abinion, CEO and owner of Fox Valley Motor Group and one of Richmond's clients.

Abinion first worked with Richmond on the purchase of a site for one of his three auto dealerships in St. Charles three years ago. The dealership had outgrown the previous site it was leasing and needed new real estate. Richmond's knowledge of the geographic area and ability to negotiate with the municipal governments involved helped Abinion get the tax incentives he was hoping for to grow his business in the northwest suburbs.

"We could have brought in a bigger law firm, but because Scott is so connected within that community, he was able to get us an even better incentive package than we expected," Abinion says. "His relationships in that community and his ability to stay even-keeled have really helped us over the past three years that we have worked with Scott."

In addition to working with Richmond on the acquisition of real estate for his car dealerships, Abinion has worked with him on other matters related to his business.

Most recently, Richmond helped Abinion purchase Insured Peril insurance for a special seasonal promotion. The deal was that if it snowed more than four inches on Christmas Day, Fox Valley Auto Group would pay for all the cars purchased the weekend before Christmas.

While Richmond had never worked with this kind of insurance before, he stepped up to the task of finding the best way to do it and getting the best deal he could for his client, Abinion says.

"He found lots of things that we didn't even see to work out the best contract for us with the insurance company," Abinion says. "He does whatever needs to get done to help out his clients."

CONVENIENT COMMUNITY LOCATION

Many of Richmond's clients, like Fox Valley Motor Group, are located close to his firm's offices in South Elgin and Huntley. The matters he works on are primarily in Kane, McHenry, DuPage and Kendall counties.

Richmond grew up in Glen Ellyn and decided to build a reputation and a home for himself in the Elgin area.

"I've always been the kind of person who likes to be involved, and I've really set up a life out here for my family and for my practice," Richmond says. "While there is sometimes an appeal to going into the city and working for a bigger firm, out here I have the chance to be home to see my family and get involved in my community."

Richmond gets involved in the northwestern suburban community he calls home in a number of ways. He has served as a village trustee in South Elgin from 2005 to 2013 and since 2014, taking just the one year off. In that role, he served as board liaison to the Intergovernmental Affairs Committee, the Police Department, the Public Works Department and the Finance Department.

He is a board member for Food for Greater Elgin and serves on the board of directors at Advocate Sherman Hospital. He is also currently serving on the Board of Alignment Collaborative for Education for School District U-46 in Elgin.

Working at a smaller firm near his home has allowed him the opportunity to spend some of his time away from the office pursuing this involvement, Richmond says.

Another advantage of working at Ariano Hardy Ritt, Richmond says, is he has enjoyed how associates get many chances to secure advice and mentorship from the firm's partners. Since he's now grown from an associate into a partner, he likes having time to work with younger associates as well.

"There's a reason it's called practicing law," Richmond says. "You don't come out of law school knowing how to practice. You have to work on it with people who have more experience than you."

DOING GOOD WORK BUILDS REPUTATION

Continuing to work hard, follow best practices, and build a reputation is what ultimately yields success in the business of law, Richmond says. He estimates about 80 percent of his clients come in through a referral from another client or from other lawyers. And so, doing right by the people you work for is crucial.

"It's ultimately about doing good work," Richmond says. "We do the best we can possibly do for each of our clients, and that's what keeps us going and what brings in more clients."

By building a reputation, the firm is steadily growing. With five full-time and two part-time attorneys currently working on the team, Ariano Hardy Ritt recently added a new associate and is hoping to add another next year. Richmond believes the firm's culture will bring in some great new additions.

"We have a relaxed and collegial atmosphere here. Associates can sit down with a partner and talk things through," he says. "I enjoy being able to mentor our newer members just as I was mentored when I first started practicing."

Reuland thinks Richmond will be a strong mentor for his younger colleagues. Richmond's desire to do as much as possible for the client while remaining even-keeled is a great asset for attorneys of any age, Reuland says.

"His strengths as an attorney are also going to be his strengths as a mentor. He stays focused on the client and how to get the best for them," Reuland says. "No matter what kind of law he's practicing, he strives for efficiencies and tries not to waste time or money. Those are some of the best values of the practice."

As Richmond supports his firm, he feels his family has been his main support system throughout his career. Coming home to his wife, Sandy, his 20-year-old daughter, Ariana (when she is home from college), and his 17-year-old son, Alex, is the best part of his workday, Richmond says.

When he's not at the office, he likes fishing and camping with his family and attending his children's volleyball and baseball games.

Whether market conditions are great or grim, Richmond works his hardest to achieve the outcome his clients desire. Whether that means learning how to complete a transaction he's never worked on before or using the same methods he's handled dozens of times, he remains even-keeled and keeps sometimes emotionally charged matters in check.

Richmond and his firm hope his involvement with community and clients will continue far into the future. ■



In Batavia in 2016. From left: daughter Ariana, Richmond, wife Sandy, son Alex