

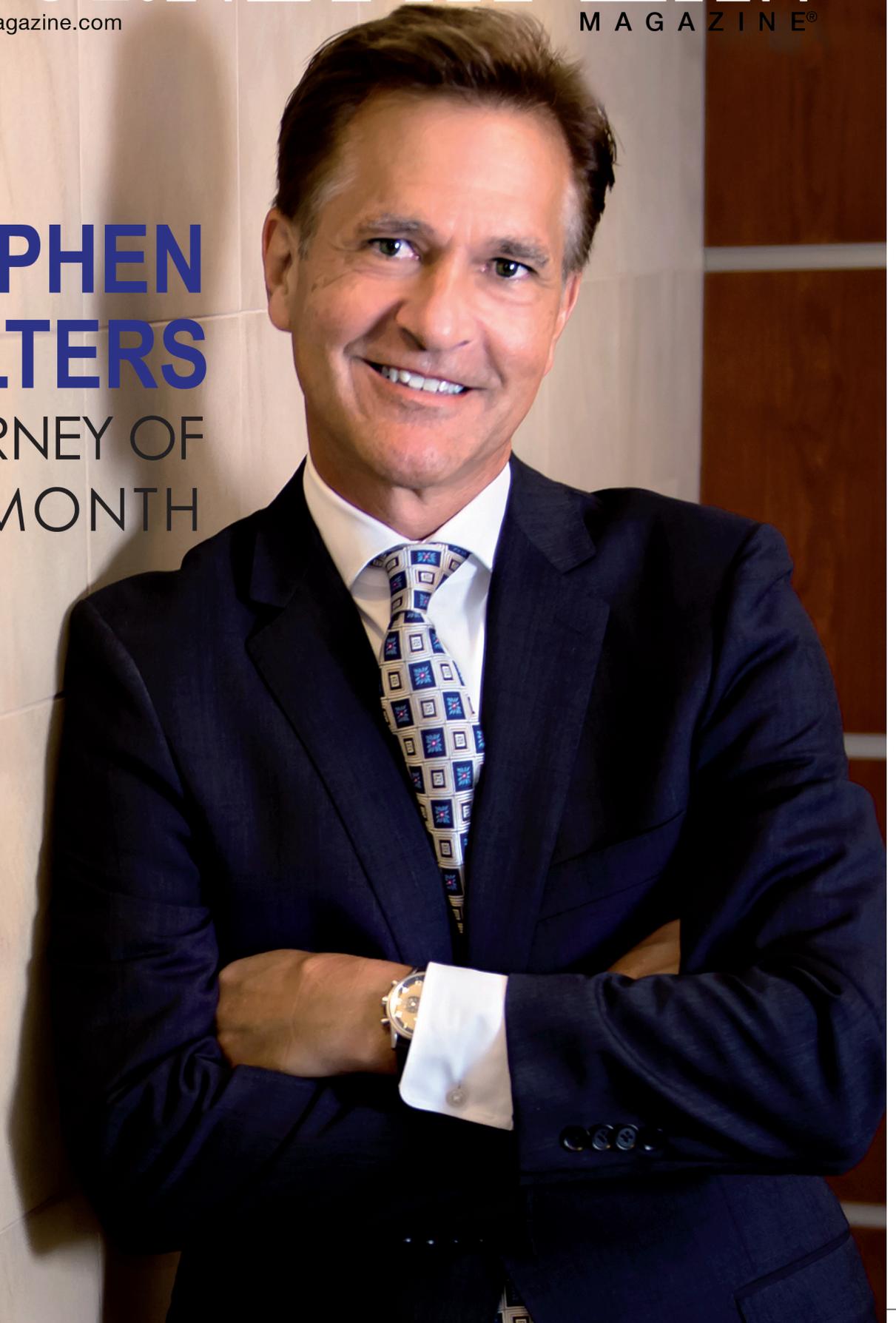
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**STEPHEN
WALTERS**
ATTORNEY OF
THE MONTH



STEPHEN WALTERS

Evolving Working Class Values INTO LEADERSHIP

By Lynette Carrington

Although Stephen Walters may not have initially had a clear-cut path into the legal profession, he has forged his own way with perseverance and passion. As a stalwart advocate for his clients in the areas of medical malpractice and health care defense, his commitment to client service is always front and center. In his duties as managing partner at Reminger Co., LPA, he successfully juggles the issues that arise daily at the 13 Reminger offices throughout Ohio, Kentucky and Indiana. His leadership style contributed to the Reminger firm being recently named the Top Workplace in Northeast Ohio Among Midsized Companies in a survey conducted by the Cleveland Plain Dealer.

Getting Started – Mentors and Heroes

Walters had family and friends that inspired and encouraged him while providing sound advice and memorable life lessons as he made his way toward law school. “My dad was a truck driver and my mother was a housewife,” Walters says. “They both had great work ethics and were successful in their own right. However, no one in my family or extended family was a professional. It was natural for my father to push me in the direction of manufacturing because there were a number of union jobs in the area where I grew up and the steel mills were still running strong. My

mom encouraged me to get an education.” Walters knew he wanted to go to college and yearned to do something different from his father. After consideration, he realized the field of law seemed to best suit his skill set. Walters knew he would be comfortable being a lawyer. Walters draws parallels to his childhood and feeling compelled to compete, and feels it was just a natural attraction to litigation, which most times has a winner and loser.

“I knew absolutely nothing about it other than what I saw on T.V., but it looked interesting and I chose that course,” says Walters. “As a child, I received wonderful advice from my grandmother to try and assist and help people. A legal career seemed like a good place to make that happen.”

There have been others that have encouraged Walters along the way. “I’ve had many people that I consider heroes and mentors,” Walters explains. “I certainly have my mentor, friend and the most trusted business person I know and that was the person who preceded me in the managing partner role at Reminger, Mario Ciano. He’s taught me both how to lead people and how to engage in the business of practicing law. He’s been a great mentor in terms of teaching me that humanity and being a good human being are not inconsistent with good business.”

“My legal hero is my dear friend and

partner, Bill Meadows. His attention to detail, sound advice and friendship serve as a foundation for Reminger’s continued success. He also protects me from myself at times.”

Walters also cites his own uncle, Sonny Wojtkiewicz, who recently passed away as an honored mentor. “The best way I can describe him is as the most generous and beautiful person I’ve ever met who accomplished so much more and impacted so many people because of his generosity and kindness. He remained in my life until he passed away this past December. He was a wonderful man,” Walters says.

Walters is also grateful to his parents for challenging him by sending him to a parochial school. “I met many friends in high school who I’m still friends with today,” Walters explains. “Most have gone on to become remarkable successes. I have friends that I went to school with that are CEOs and CFOs of companies and a friend who does professional negotiations for LeBron James. They all came from similar working class backgrounds. Many people have impacted my life and continue to do so. I’m a big believer in surrounding yourself with excellence.”

“I would be remiss in not mentioning my wife, Ranae, as well as my daughters, Stephanie, Abigail and Melanie. They have mentored me on what is truly important in life and the importance of a loving family as a necessary component of being happy.”

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Studio Z Photography

The Road to Reminger

Walters attended law school, spent a little more than a decade in the public sector and in private practice prior to coming to Reminger. It was the sum of those experiences that shaped and gave him experience on the way to what would ultimately become his dream job.

“I really had no idea what I was doing,” muses Walters. “I went to law school

locally in Cleveland and I financed my own law school education, which was great. Between borrowing some money and working I was able to get through law school but in the meantime, I was also able to secure employment with the bus company, The Greater Cleveland Regional Transit Authority (RTA), in the law department.” He clerked with the bus company for two years while he

made his way through law school, during a time in the early 1980s that was bleak for Cleveland’s legal community. Walters had contemplated moving to Dallas, but ultimately accepted an offer from the bus company when some personal family issues made it important for his wife, Ranae, to remain in Cleveland.

“I spent four years at RTA and they were a remarkable four years in that I was given immediate responsibility—unlike something that a big law firm would do,” Walters explains. “They handed me a docket of cases as a brand new lawyer which provided me with not only a depth of experience but taught me how to make decisions on my own, and I had people that helped me learn my craft.” Sensing a ceiling to his work in public sector employment, Walters sought work in the private sector.

A friend of Walters who had taken a job at a local law firm called Walters and suggested he come on board. “I took a job at Kitchen, Messner & Deery starting my medical malpractice career, something I’d never done before but had always been interested in because my wife Ranae is a registered nurse,” Walters says. “That became a natural fit for me and I was at that firm for seven years. I loved the people I worked with; although, I struggled with what the future would hold based on what I believed to be an antiquated business model.” This led to discussions with Reminger.

“I always loved Reminger because my experience with their people was positive – always excellent lawyers, but even better people,” continues Walters. “I had discussed joining Reminger for many years, first with Dick Reminger, then with Mario Ciano and Gary Goldwasser. Finally, the timing was right and I have never looked back.”



Medical Defense

At Reminger, Walters counts the Cleveland Clinic and major clinics, hospitals and doctors from the Greater Cleveland area among his clients. "I've enjoyed the practice because I'm helping people that are helping people in need," he states. "I have the opportunity to guide doctors and health care providers through the legal process when they are sued. It's oftentimes overwhelming. I've watched doctors go through a metamorphosis over time and see how they are impacted by a lawsuit. They are affected more than the public might ever imagine when an unfortunate and unexpected outcome suddenly turns into litigation."

It is heart-wrenching when he cannot get a favorable outcome for his client, but Walters is always committed to assisting caregivers through every step of the process. To date, he has tried 130 cases.

One particular story routinely stands out in his mind which he uses to illustrate the importance of preparation when mentoring other lawyers at Reminger. One value that all attorneys pass on to the younger attorneys at the firm is to "be prepared all the time." Walters relays the story about something that came up at his previous firm one Friday afternoon and serves as a lesson why preparation can be so important. "I stopped with a couple of my colleagues to have a beer at the bar that was in the building. One of my partners came in and asked if I could cover a pre-trial for him the coming

Monday. He was involved in another trial. This pre-trial was in an adjacent county. He handed me the file, I put it in the back seat of my car and went home."

Walters got up Monday morning and went to the courthouse, walked in and the doors to the courtroom were shut. "I opened the doors and the judge said, 'Mr. Walters are you here to represent the defendant health care facility?' I said yes, but I asked to approach the bench because there was a jury already in the box," the attorney explains. "I said, 'Judge, it was my understanding that this was turned into a final pre-trial and we're not having a trial. I stated, 'I'm just covering and am not prepared.' He responded, 'Are you here for the defendant? Sit down. We're starting.' I managed to get through the first day and you can imagine the phone call to my colleague on the ride home when I said, 'What the hell did you get me into!?!' I managed my way through it and won the case with significant help. This experience illustrates to our Reminger lawyers to always be prepared by exhibiting the potential ramifications of not being ready."

Reminger – An Exceptional Place to Work

Walters is the first one to recognize that the legal field is a people-centric business and to attract and keep happy, engaged and motivated staff, the workplace should be something special.

"The strength of our business goes up and down the elevator each day," Walters explains. "That includes the lawyers and the staff. The founder of the firm, Dick Reminger, was very much a supporter of every Reminger employee. He passed this attribute to every lawyer at the firm who arrived before me. As Reminger has grown considerably over the years, it's been a challenge to keep the tradition, but the lawyers are still focused on recognizing the contributions of each and every member of the firm."

"One of the hardest parts of our job is employee retention. You invest in people when they join you. One of the best ways to retain them is to be fair and honest. However, we also need to reward people. One such program is employee of the year, where we try to recognize someone who exemplifies our culture." The employee of the year receives an all-expenses paid vacation for themselves and their family anywhere in the world. The trip is in addition to any regular vacation time. This is one of many customs and programs which Walters uses to foster goodwill, loyalty and commitment.

In 2009, Walters took the idea of community commitment to the next level with the founding of The Reminger Foundation. He now serves as its president. "We do significant charitable and philanthropic work and I thought it would be nice to have a foundation that everyone could give to and be a part of

and make a bigger impact. Last year, we gave to about 150 different charities,” Walters explains. Most of the employees give to the foundation via payroll deduction. Each employee is free to pick the charitable organizations that they want to support within their own area. “We have directors who meet each month and go over all the applications for monetary requests and approve the selected requests,” says Walters.

Managing Partner Duties

Juggling a caseload, managing 13 offices and serving as president of the foundation can be tricky, but Walters handles it all with a cool finesse. “I still spend about 50 percent of my time practicing and 50 percent of the time managing the firm,” says Walters. When he is practicing or not available, he has a competent group of go-to people empowered to make important decisions.

“I have an executive group, management group, as well as managers in each of the offices. To make it all work, we have clear lines on the decisions I need to make versus those they are empowered to handle. We have different lawyers in charge of each of the respective offices that make many decisions and share the same vision for the future of our law firm.” I believe we create a trusting environment with people of extraordinary character who each strive to make the person coming behind them better. The culture established by the firm management ensures a dynamic workplace for years to come and Walters plans to spend the remainder of his legal career at Reminger, the firm that he loves.



AT A GLANCE

Education

Juris Doctor, Cleveland Marshall College of Law, 1983
Bachelor of Arts, Cleveland State University, 1980

Bar Admissions

State of Ohio

Practice Areas

Medical Malpractice
Health Care
Professional Liability
Construction Liability
Governmental & Public Entity Liability
D&O and Employment Practices
Corporate & General Business

Honors & Recognitions

Listed in Best Lawyers in America, 1999-2015
Recognized as a Super Lawyer by Ohio Super Lawyers Magazine, 2006, 2008-2015
Recognized as one of the Top 50 Attorneys in the Cleveland Area, 2012, published in Cleveland Magazine

Professional Memberships & Community Affiliations

The American Bar Foundation, Life Fellow
Claims and Litigation Management Alliance
Greater Cleveland Partnership
Federation of Defense & Corporate Counsel

Hobbies

Golf, Reading, Running and Travel

Favorite Quotes

“None of us is as smart as all of us.”

– **Kenneth H. Blanchard**

“The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing.”

– **Edmund Burke**

Reminger Co. LPA
101 W. Prospect Ave., Suite 1400
Cleveland, OH 44115
(216) 687-1311
www.reminger.com