

Apex

of a Career Motivated by Independence

Profile of incoming PBA President Forest N. Myers

By Don Sarvey

One of Forest Myers' friends from his days at the Dickinson School of Law is unsurprised that Myers has risen to the presidency of the Pennsylvania Bar Association. "He was very well-liked in law school," said Lawrence B. "Chip" Abrams III, now retired from Rhoads & Sinon in Harrisburg. More important, he added that Myers "was always interested in service, always available to help." That's a pretty good start on the definition of a bar association president: Being there to help colleagues build the profession.

Being president is demanding in the sense that a lot of meetings and travel around the state go with the territory. Being a sole practitioner in that circumstance can be an added burden. But Forest N. Myers doesn't see it as a burden and that, perhaps, is one clue to his outlook. He sees being a sole practitioner as an advantage. "I can tailor my schedule around the PBA functions that I have to attend," he said. And because his practice is currently built largely on courtroom-free estate work, he said he's "not bound by court schedules" and hence has "a lot of flexibility" to carry out bar business. A glass-half-full kind of guy.

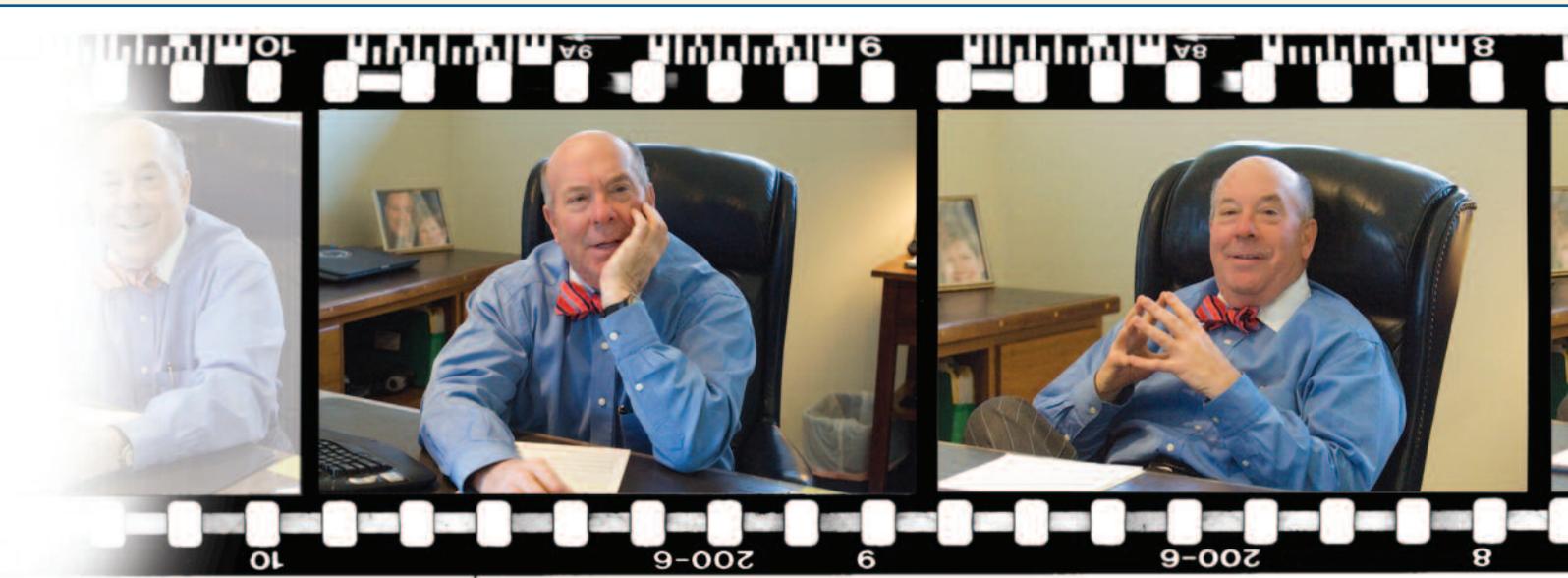
Home is Shippensburg. His office is built onto his house, which sits on a wide street in a quiet neighborhood. The office has lots of glass with a good view of a sculpted and manicured backyard that, for many, might be a vacation in itself. He's

been on his own for all but two of the years he has been in full-time private practice. He added the office to his house in 1996. Before that he had an office in downtown Shippensburg. For a very short time he also had a partner and some associates, but he said it felt like he was on a treadmill, working harder "to pay other people."

The story of how Myers became a lawyer is connected to his desire for independence. He graduated from Penn State in 1969 with a degree in political science. "I was hired out of college into a special program the Navy was developing to train computer programmers," he said. He ended up in Washington, D.C., working as a GS-11 at a room-sized IBM 360-60. Back in the day, being a programmer meant juggling keypunch cards. He came up with a shortcut to reduce the lines of code in the project he was working on. Fewer cards, less machine time, lower cost. Or so he figured. The Navy didn't appreciate his efforts. He caught hell, and it made him realize "government was not the place for me."

He thought about the many lawyers his father knew. His father was postmaster in Chambersburg. One of the lawyers he particularly admired was a neighbor, Edmund C. Wingerd, who was PBA president in 1946-47. "You could see they did good things," Myers said of the lawyers in Chambersburg. He saw that "the law gives you the ability to be your own boss and do some good." That "be your own boss" had an attractive ring.





He looks back on what he calls a “charm-ed” childhood. When he was born his family lived in a house in the forest in Caledonia State Park, situated in Adams and Franklin counties. He said this was why his father named him Forest. “My father loved the outdoors and the mountains and he really never wanted to leave.” His father, Glen, and his mother, Virginia, a nurse, moved the family — Myers and his two sisters — into Chambersburg to make it easier for school and jobs. But living in town wasn’t year-round. “We always had a second home out at Caledonia and summers we would live out there,” Myers said. During those summers he worked for the park and caddied at the golf course, which dates back to the 1920s. And the park is where he met his future wife, Becky, who had friends with a summer home. (She recently retired after 30 years of teaching art. They have two grown children, a daughter, Meghan, who lives in New Jersey and works in advertising in New York City, and a son, Berkley, an engineer who lives and works in Maryland.)

Law school it was. Myers took the LSAT and was accepted to Dickinson 10 days after he applied. While at Dickinson, he worked summers on legislative and political campaigns for the Pennsylvania AFL-CIO and rubbed shoulders with Pennsylvania labor legends Mike Johnson and

Harry Boyer. It is with what he calls “astonishment” that he now looks back on himself as a young McGovern Democrat in those days. After graduation from law school in 1973, he went to work for the Pennsylvania Labor Relations Board in Harrisburg doing appellate work. He also practiced part time in Shippensburg and did some labor work privately, helping to negotiate some local labor contracts. In 1977 he started practicing full time as a solo in Shippensburg and eased away from labor law — he said it tends to be a practice area more typically found in larger cities — and into real estate, wills and trusts, and general small-town business law.

His introduction to the PBA came through membership on the Unauthorized Practice of Law Committee. Unauthorized practice still gets him steamed: “That’s been 20, 25 years, and I have seen over that period the erosion of what lawyers are expected to do by the public and groups taking away our practice — I mean realtors, public accountants, notaries, and then you add in LegalZoom and We The People and all these online providers.” He’d like unauthorized practice to be one of his areas of focus as president but recognizes that cracking down is a tough task for a voluntary bar association without enforcement powers.



Myers has been well backgrounded for his presidency. He served as president of the Franklin County Bar Association. His community achievements include a stint as president of the Shippensburg Area School Board and chair of the Shippensburg United Way. He was a member of the PBA Board of Governors from 2007 to 2010 and is a past Zone 3 representative to the House of Delegates. He's a member of the Solo and Small Firm Practice Section. And he's the current chair of the Presidential Strategic Planning Committee.

His big target in the coming year is membership. "I hope that I can grow the PBA in terms of membership. I know what the PBA has done for me. It's made me a better lawyer, it's given me tools to help me practice law, it's given me opportunities to expand my practice, and I think that, frankly, every lawyer should want to take advantage of that. I think PBA membership is the bargain of the century if you take advantage of all the benefits that are provided."

Myers is a believer in face-to-face solicitation for members. "What I hope we'll be able to do, particularly in areas where there are large numbers we can reach out to, like Philadelphia and Pittsburgh, is to recruit people to come to a meeting attended by officers, local leaders of the

association, zone governors, past presidents, plus PBA staff. We [can] create some CLE they can come to for free ... and give them breakfast ... and tell them why they ought to be members, face to face."

He'd also like to establish a closer marketing link through the Pennsylvania Bar Institute CLE offerings. "We have a captive audience, thousands of lawyers every year who come to PBI for CLE. Many people who attend those programs aren't members of the PBA. I would like to do a public service announcement about the PBA and why you should be a member, a three- or five-minute public service announcement that would be shown at every CLE that PBI puts on. There would be someone there who would be responsible to see that if somebody wants to join they have an application. In other words, don't let them out of the room without signing an application if they say they're interested."

Myers said he would also like to develop discount or special membership deals for "various affinity bar groups." He said, "I would like to see the PBA have some kind of formal affiliation [to] somehow offer to their members some of the benefits, at a reduced cost, that we give to our members and invite them to joint meetings."

George Glen, another old friend who practices in Chambersburg and who frequently meets Myers for lunch and bicycles with him regularly, describes Myers as a smart guy and a good listener and said he expects him to bring "an understanding of non-city practice" to his year as PBA president. "We still adhere to a little more of the old days of the profession. It's not a business to us."

Chip Abrams added, "Forest has a very nice way of dealing with difficult issues. He makes everything pleasant. You know, some lawyers create problems. Forest solves problems. I predict a very good year for the bar under Forest's leadership. He'll be a hell of a boost to our sole practitioners. Forest understands." ♦



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