



# Alumni Perspective



## ALUMNI PROFILES



### DAVID R. BRINK

Class of 1947

David Brink was born to storytellers: Raymond, a math professor who spun bedtime tales of a good-hearted monster, and Carol Ryrie Brink, author of 1936 Newbery Medal winner *Caddie Woodlawn*. So it's no surprise that he sought a combined arts and law degree when enrolling in the Law School in 1939.

Unfortunately, World War II Navy cryptology service intervened. He returned to Minnesota to collect his J.D. in 1947, but the arts had to wait.

Brink considered teaching until a favorite law professor, Bill Prosser ('28), suggested he try what is now Dorsey & Whitney.

"Even if I decided to teach, I figured some practice would be good for me. Thirty days later, I thought, 'This practice is the life!' I was scared all the time that I was going to be fired, but I loved it," says Brink, who stayed for 43 years. Assigned to trusts and estates, he worked for Harry Blackmun, then took the helm of that department after Blackmun was appointed to the 8th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals (he later became Blackmun's personal lawyer). Brink also taught continuing education classes and became president of the

Hennepin County Bar Association, Minnesota State Bar Association, and American Bar Association.

"I tried to stand for reform and the public interest in my professional life, and especially my bar-related life," he says. He spent his 1981-82 ABA term crisscrossing the country, rallying opposition to congressional conservatives' efforts to limit court jurisdiction in issues such as civil rights, school busing, and abortion. "It was a big fight. They tried hard and came pretty close." He also helped the ABA devise programs for developing countries seeking justice and democracy.

Brink remains active as retired partner, bar association member, and board member for Lawyers Concerned For Lawyers, where he also "helps in the trenches." He fell in love with poetry at age 87 and proceeded to teach poetry courses,

**1** Matthew Webster ('11) and Pe Goromou, whom Matthew represented in an asylum case as a student attorney with the Immigration and Human Rights Clinic.

**2** Kenneth Corey-Edstrom ('83) and Yi-Ping Chang ('16) at the Multicultural Student Welcome Reception in September

**3** Julie Ritz-Schlaifer ('89), Lisa Elliott ('89), and Daniel Guerrero ('89) enjoying Spring Alumni Weekend in April

**4** Kevin Qian ('92), Suya Yang and Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg during Ginsburg's visit to the Law School in September

**5** Michele Garnett-McKenzie ('96) participates in the Center for New Americans' launch event panel in September.

**6** Justice Paul Anderson ('68) talks to students after delivering the Bearmon Lecture to 1Ls in September.



launch the Poetry Club of Edina, and write enough poems to fill the volumes he hopes to publish.

At 95, Brink says he still has 51% of his marbles—most days. Though he's "disturbed by the Supreme Court's present complexion" and wishes today's lawyers were less competitive and more collegial, "I think the profession is in pretty good shape," he says. "Our system is still the best there is."

### **REGINALD D. STEER** Class of 1969

"I wanted to be a corporate lawyer, involved in deals, securities, things like that. I was far too shy ever to imagine standing up in front of a jury. But the U.S. Army decided my career path should change," says Reginald Steer. Drafted during law school at the height of the Vietnam War, he was a judge advocate general (JAG) officer serving in Korea when he faced his first jury trial, a murder defense case.

"If you can do that, you can try just about anything," he says. And he did: assault, black marketeering, drug



crimes. But criminal defense wasn't his destiny. Back in civilian life, he signed on for nearly three decades with the San Francisco firm of Pillsbury, Madison & Sutro (now Pillsbury Winthrop Shaw Pittman), where he litigated cases ranging from unfair competition to intellectual property disputes. Now senior partner at the San Francisco office of Akin Gump Strauss Hauer & Feld, he still likes going to trial.

"I most enjoy developing antitrust cases," he says. "The antitrust bar quality is high on both plaintiff and defense sides, and the intellectual

challenge is there. You learn about different industries, and I find that fascinating."

His legal life is not confined to courtrooms, however. He mentors young lawyers, teaches trial skills, and devotes considerable time to pro bono activities, including serving on the board of an organization that provides legal services for immigrants. A former director of the San Francisco Parks Trust, he serves on the board of the San Francisco Museum and Historical Society, charged with restoring and establishing a museum in a classic Greek revival building that survived the 1906 earthquake.

"The most important course I took in law school was Robert Levy's divorce counseling seminar, which was like group therapy. He taught participants a lot about being honest with themselves, learning to face their strengths and weaknesses," says Steer. Those lessons are valuable when nonprofit boards become contentious because well-meaning individuals advocate for different interests.

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“Finding a way to accommodate them can be a challenge,” he says.

He credits law school for his track record. “When I started at Pillsbury, Madison and saw all those Harvard and Stanford grads, I thought my chances for success would be very limited. But it didn’t turn out that way. My training equipped me superbly for success at an excellent, demanding law firm, and for criminal courts-martial. Minnesota doesn’t get the recognition it deserves.”



### LYNN ROBERSON

Class of 1979

Lynn Roberson explains her success as a litigator simply: “It was the only job I ever had that I liked. It’s always challenging, rarely dull, and I’m good at it.”

Raised in an Air Force family, Roberson flitted from Texas to Hawaii and other bases before landing at the University of Maryland to earn a psychology B.A., then from one ill-fitting job to another before landing in law school. She was working in Robins, Kaplan, Miller & Ciresi’s Atlanta office when she met her future husband while studying for the Georgia bar. For him, moving to her firm’s frostbitten home base wasn’t an option.

“I’ve been stuck here for 30 years,” chuckles Roberson. She knew what kind of job she wanted when she applied to the Atlanta firm Swift, Currie, McGhee & Hiers in 1984, but she wasn’t sure she’d get it. “I’m a pushy broad, not a shy, retiring violet. Sometimes guys have issues with that.” But Swift Currie turned out to be “a Southern gentleman’s law firm—the good part, not the bad part.” The firm is comprised of

family-oriented, highly ethical colleagues she really likes.

She also likes defending premises liability and personal injury cases. “I like the logic of the law, even though a lot of times it doesn’t make sense. I like investigating, digging for information. I like winning. And I like cases where you think the plaintiff is a fraud or exaggerator or crazy person, and you persuade the jury that the story the plaintiff is trying to sell isn’t something they should buy.”

She describes an alleged-rape case where forensic evidence contradicted the purported victim’s story. Five days of trial were nerve-wracking, but Roberson’s side won. “The jury was out for 14 minutes,” she recalls. “That was a lot of fun.”

Roberson also prevails in many volunteer leadership roles. As president of the Atlanta Bar Association, she challenged the organization to support the marriage equality amicus briefs before the U.S. Supreme Court. Members voted unanimously to do so, making theirs the only mainstream bar association outside California to sign on. Roberson’s advocacy earned her the Conspicuous Service to the Stonewall Community Award in 2013.

“I didn’t feel particularly courageous doing it, but it would have been cowardly not to,” she says. “I didn’t want to be on the wrong side of history.”

### TONI HALLEEN

Class of 1988

Toni Halleen’s career arc emanated from an unlikely source: the *Smothers Brothers Comedy Hour*. At age 9, the daughter of a minister dad and artist/feminist mom was transfixed by how the TV duo used music and comedy to soften the edges of social and political issues and capture the hearts of people whose minds had been made up. She played her guitar, practiced jokes, and set off for Mount Holyoke, the nation’s oldest women’s college, where studying the politics of patriarchy piqued her sense of justice and equality.

“I found out that married women in some states could not own



property. It was 1980. I was horrified,” she says. “I needed to go to law school to figure that out.”

Employment law became her cause. She joined the law firm of Briggs and Morgan, then moved to ADC Telecommunications as in-house counsel. “Going from a large firm where everyone supported the lawyers to a corporation where lawyers supported everyone else was a real eye-opener. But it was fun for me, because it was creative problem-solving with economy and efficiency in mind.”

She embraced that creativity until the economy tanked, and overseeing waves of layoffs became “pure pain. But that’s when the musical landed in my soul.” Flexible legal work at The General Counsel Ltd. allowed her time to write *Soulless, Bloodsucking Lawyers: A Musical*, the 2003 Minnesota Fringe Festival’s best-selling show. She also launched Fun with Law, developing seminars that help lawyers polish communication and client service skills—and lighten up.

“I believe that strength comes from combining opposites,” says Halleen. “It’s the Smothers Brothers—combining serious intellect and difficult problems with comedy and music.”

In 2008, defense lawyer Halleen met plaintiff’s lawyer (and classmate) Lawrence Schaefer (’88) at an employment law conference. The two married and joined forces at his 10-attorney firm, now Schaefer Halleen LLC. Opposites coming together, she notes. “I came in to run the business side, but it became more and more apparent that our perspectives complemented each other.”

She’s having fun again—coaching plaintiffs, promoting workshops, and

writing a novel as part of the Loft Literary Center mentorship program. All of which rely on her J.D.

“You can do anything with a law degree—you just may not know it at the time,” she says. “I’m a great example. I just kept saying yes.”

### NICK ROGERS

Class of 2008

The road from accounting to soccer—through law school—involved lots of “zigging and zagging. It was not a straight line,” says Nick Rogers, who was named president of the Minnesota United soccer team in January 2013.

Rogers knew after earning an accounting B.A. at the University of Maryland that finance wasn’t his passion. Law school promised more opportunity; he applied to nine. “I’d always been a reader, an arguer, someone who appreciated the power of words,” he says. He’d never been to Minnesota when he was accepted by the Law School; he figured he’d return to the East Coast after graduating. He practiced for nearly five years at Gaskins Bennett Birrell Schupp in Minneapolis and the Washington, D.C. office of Winston



& Strawn. But commercial litigation didn’t thrill him, and “the grind of billable hours began to wear on me,” he says.

Meanwhile, a “full-blown obsession” took hold in off hours. During law school, he’d fallen out of love with injury-riddled American football, which he’d played in high school. “When that mental real estate opened up, soccer moved in,” he says. When his wife mentioned that her friend’s father, North American Soccer League president David Downs, wanted to sell the league’s Minnesota franchise, he was ready.

Rogers persuaded his father-in-law, former UnitedHealth Group CEO and philanthropist Dr. Bill McGuire, to buy the team. Rogers helped

broker the deal and took over the front office, building staff from 4 to about 35 and using wisdom gained from every previous zig and zag.

“Legal education teaches you a lot about process, procedure, dispute resolution and management. There’s a lot of fun stuff—negotiating deals with players, drafting contracts, reviewing sponsorship agreements. But the most important part is issue-spotting, knowing when I need to call in outside counsel,” he says.

He’s not getting rich, but building something new is fun. “Pro sports is not the most lucrative career a person can pursue, even as an athlete. It’s a passion project,” he says. Game attendance was only 1,000 to 1,500 when he started, and only two to three percent of adults even knew pro soccer existed in the Twin Cities market.

“This year we’re seeing 5,000 to 6,000 people at games. That’s a huge increase in attendance and visibility,” he says. “If you’re a pro soccer fan, this is the club you’ve been waiting for.”

By Cathy Madison, a freelance writer and editor based in the Twin Cities

## ALUMNI NEWS AND AWARDS

### Michael W. Unger ('81) Chosen President-Elect of the Minnesota State Bar Association



Michael W. Unger ('81) became president-elect of the Minnesota

State Bar Association (MSBA) on July 1 and will serve in that role throughout the association’s 2014-15 bar year. The office puts Unger on track to become the MSBA’s president during the 2015-16 bar year. Unger had been serving as MSBA secretary since July 2012.

Unger is a personal injury lawyer with Unger Law Office in Minneapolis. He is an MSBA-certified civil trial specialist who was honored in 2009 with the organization’s Professional Excellence Award for his representation of a victim of the I-35W bridge collapse.

Unger is a past president of the Minnesota Justice Foundation, the

Academy of Certified Trial Lawyers of Minnesota, the Hennepin County Bar Association, and the Hennepin County Bar Foundation. He has also served on the board of directors of the Minnesota Trial Lawyers Association and the Minnesota Association for Justice. He has received the President’s Award from the Hennepin County Bar Foundation for his dedicated volunteer service, and in 2011 *Minnesota Lawyer* magazine selected him for its Outstanding Service to the Profession Award for his help in creating the nonprofit legal referral service Call For Justice.