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her partner at Fredrikson & Byron. Most proud of her two daughters and supportive husband, she says it was “critically important to have a family structure that was solid and wonderful.”



RONALD C. WHEELER

Class of 1984

“Life is full of surprises,” muses Ron Wheeler, “and mine have mostly been pleasant ones.” The senior vice president for content protection with Fox Entertainment Group never set out to fight pirates, but he embraced whatever swashbuckling adventures came his way.

When he applied to the Department of Justice’s Antitrust Division for a second-year law school internship, he didn’t make the first cut. He wasn’t even first on the waiting list. But when, in those pre-email days, the leading candidate dropped out, Wheeler was the first one who happened to be at home to pick up the phone and accept the post.

“It was a tremendous experience for me,” he recalls, and it led to corporate antitrust positions at New York firms Shearman & Sterling and Weil, Gotshal & Manges. He became a specialist—one of very few—in a Depression-era statute, the Robinson-Patman Act, and that expertise landed him, in 1994, at 20th Century Fox’s home video division in Los Angeles, where more surprises waited.

Hollywood wasn’t the shark-infested pool he expected. Instead, he discovered big-studio camaraderie, loyalty, opportunity, and a new specialty: copyright protection. Thanks to his experience representing such companies as Panasonic in

the DVD format wars, plus his in-house work on copy protection technology, Fox chose him to lead the battle against Internet-based piracy, launching his four-person department in 2001.

“We kept our fingers in the dikes as best we could,” he says. “Thankfully, with great company support, we’ve been adding people ever since. We’re up to 19 now.”

Technology expansion remains rapid. Although some developments are positive, such as the ability to fingerprint copyrighted work, “most are not so beneficial,” he says. “It keeps us in full employment. Every day I get up to a different challenge, a different set of problems with a different set of solutions. It’s never dull.”

“So many of my peers, from New York firms in particular, did not enjoy law school and very commonly went on to not enjoy being lawyers,” he adds. “I really did enjoy my law school experience at the U. And it’s hard for me to think of something in the legal world that has more appeal than solving the fiendishly difficult puzzle of copyright infringement.”



MATTHEW MELEWSKI

Class of 2008

Matthew Melewski wants to pursue cases that make a difference, and in a way that portends the future: via the cloud. That’s why he established The Boutique Firm last November, after six years of large-firm experience at Hunton & Williams in Washington, D.C., and Leonard, Street and Deinard in Minneapolis.

Both firms allowed him to do pro bono work, such as a Minnesota Court of Appeals case that established,

for the first time, that immigration status is not an appropriate basis for a child custody determination. “But important cases require enormous time and resources,” he says. “It’s difficult to balance them in a firm setting, where you have mandatory billable hour requirements.”

Instead of a traditional practice model, Melewski envisions one that eliminates “an office, views, boardrooms and 200 associates,” that meets clients where they are and thrives on litigation disputes that don’t require massive discovery or resources. And while such law-practice basics as maintaining a good reputation and generating business are the same, other aspects—technology, for one—have changed dramatically in the past five years.

Melewski cites another: “The value proposition. When the market started to tank, there wasn’t as much focus on legal expenditures as a cost of doing business, but now it’s easier to convince executives and corporate counsel that they can get the same quality for far less money. At the end of the day, we’re service providers. We like to think of ourselves as more, but from a business standpoint, we’re just another division with a budget.”

Armed with a laptop, an online library, and a sophisticated cloud-based filing and billing system, he focuses on state and federal court litigation and environmental law. Clients range from national and international industry groups to a pro sports team and a Guantanamo detainee. He has already added one attorney and hopes for more, licensed to practice in different jurisdictions and able to accomplish from a laptop what they could from a big-city building.

“I’ve been lucky so far,” he says, hopping recently from Dallas to D.C. to Ottawa and Albany. “Basically, every aspect of my office is available wherever I am. I’m looking forward to more cases with significant impacts on civil liberties and vulnerable communities.” ■

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