

MEET ROBERT H. "BOB" BROWN

2019 Bradford M. "Buck" Gearinger Professionalism Award Recipient

There are two things you should know about Bob Brown that aren't immediately evident when you first meet him. Beneath that Columbo-like trench coat and tan ball cap is a guy who's attended the Sturgis (SD) Motorcycle Rally 11 times and who –despite being a tad south of age 80 – works out at his Merriman Valley gym three or four times a week. Those two things, plus doing the legal work he loves are what keep Bob young in heart and mind.

"I started working out when I was about 15. I wanted to play football in high school, and I figured that what I lacked in height, I could make up in strength. I went on to become a competitive body builder in college."

The love affair with Harley motorcycles has taken Bob all over the US, including those 11 trips to the Sturgis Rally. Once known for its "sex, drugs, and bikes" vibe, the rally has toned down as attendees have gotten older. Bob's visits included day trips he planned for himself and other bikers to the local historical sites including the Black Hills, Mount Rushmore, and Wounded Knee.

"Riding has enabled me to meet people from all walks of life and to travel to places I would have never gone but for the bikes," says Bob. "Around here, on a nice weekend, we'll go down into Amish country, get something to eat, and just enjoy the beautiful countryside."

A lifelong resident of West Akron, Bob graduated from Buchtel High School in 1958, the University of Akron in 1962, and the University of Cincinnati College of Law in 1965.



"When I came back to Akron to practice law, my friends were all urging me to come to the prosecutor's office. They were making \$650 a month, working a regular schedule, but I had some other offers and decided to take a chance and see what happened."

Bob ended up working with a friend in collections, in a practice that continued to grow and grow so that by 1970, Bob was earning a six-figure income at the largest collection practice in Summit County. At the same time, and through the 1970s, Bob picked up more and more domestic relations cases, eventually dropping the collection practice.

"In 1999, the Ohio State Bar Association started testing for attorneys who wanted to become certified in Family Law. I was among the first group of attorneys in Ohio to become certified as Family Law specialists."

Bob went on to become a fellow in the American Academy of Matrimonial Lawyers, a process that was even more rigorous than the OSBA certification. He has also been recognized as a professional in domestic relations law by his peer review groups including Best Lawyers in America, Martindale-Hubbell, Ohio Super Lawyers, and AVVO.

"But I was really blindsided by this Professionalism Award from the Akron Bar. The other honors are from people who really don't know me, but for this to come from people who know me well – that's icing on the cake!"

Bob cites luck and hard work, plus the values

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instilled by his parents, as the foundation of his professional life.

"I've been very fortunate in my practice, getting to do the thing that I like best, and working with bright people. People know me as a straight shooter who treats others as I want to be treated."

Bob reflected on the changes he's seen in the local practice of law, particularly the rise in the number of women in law school, in practice, and on the bench. Noting the recent election that created an all-female Common Pleas Court, Bob said,

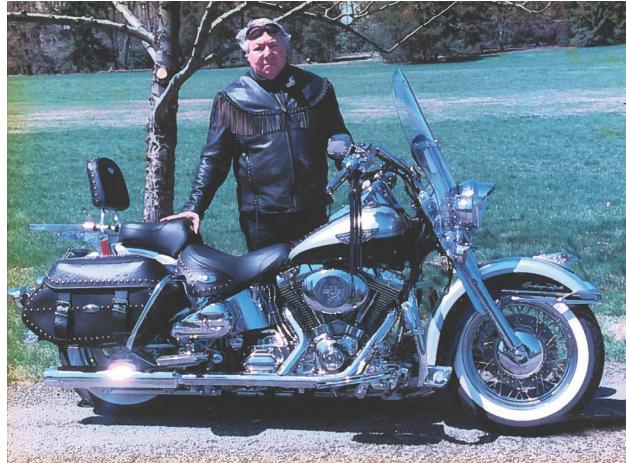
"Law used to be a boys' club, but I think we're coming full circle now."

Another element of the legal profession about which Bob has a strong opinion is advertising, and he cites a great local story to explain.

"The first thing you did when you finished law school was join the local Bar. And the first thing the Akron Bar did was put me on ethics committee. Back then, no lawyer advertised. It just wasn't done. You didn't see signs on the sides of busses or billboards. But there was this one Bar member everyone was upset with because he advertised. The guy practiced out of his home at Portage Lakes. So that someone looking for his office could find him, he put a small sign on the end of his boat dock, with his name and 'Attorney at Law'. So the committee sent me down to his place to discuss it with him. He managed to persuade the committee that his sign wasn't really advertising."

With 53 years of practice under his belt, Bob has been cutting back a bit, working 30-35 hours a week.

"As long as I am healthy and still enjoy the work, I will keep practicing."



Bob proudly displaying his 100th Anniversary Harley



Bob with sons David and Jerome, and Jerome's sons, now ages 13 and 11.



Bob with his 2001 Indian Chief Centennial Motorcycle