

Interview with Austin Bar President Chris Oddo

Chris Oddo, a partner with McGinnis, Lochridge & Kilgore, took the office of President of the Austin Bar Association on July 1.

Why did you decide to practice law?

I was determined to become a lawyer after reenacting the Sacco and Vanzetti trials in a high school class. These cases involved the controversial convictions of two Italian immigrants who were ultimately put to death. Serving as defense counsel was an exciting and rewarding experience. In our retrial, my clients lived, and I've been hooked on the justice system ever since.

What type of law do you practice?

I am a general civil litigator with a diverse and varied docket. In recent years, I have been involved in several eminent domain matters for corporate and individual landowners around the state. I also act as outside general counsel to a few commercial clients.

What do find most challenging about this type of law?

What is most challenging, but also satisfying, is not knowing what each day is going to bring. My commercial clients have new, complicated issues day in and day out. Every matter is unique and provides a great opportunity and learning experience. It certainly keeps me engaged and on my toes.

What do you find most rewarding?

I enjoy the opportunity to work with a diverse group of people and companies that really need representation and are appreciative of my efforts at the end of the process. With regard to the eminent domain cases, it is extremely rewarding to help individuals who have little legal experience understand and navigate the condemnation process in Texas.

What activities do you enjoy in your free time?

By far and away, my free time goes to my family — Harrison (7), Katie (6), and wife, Karey. The kids are at great ages, and anything I do with them — reading, fishing, or playing chess — is the joy of my life. Family aside, I like to squeeze in a mountain bike ride, and I never turn down the chance to hit the ski slopes when time permits.

What advice would you give to attorneys who want to become more involved in their community?

Someone once told me the most important gift you can give is the gift of your time. It is true that if you want something done, ask the busiest person to do it. My recommendation to our busy Austin attorneys is to identify something important to you and get involved. Austin and Central Texas abound with opportunities for community service and nonprofits are always looking for lawyers to serve on their boards. Half of the battle is choosing to get involved in something you truly care about; the other half is showing up and making the time commitment. For example, one great opportunity for attorneys to get involved here in Austin is through Volunteer Legal Services, which due to budget cuts is in dire need of attorney volunteers.

You are well known for your commitment to professional leadership. In your opinion, what does it take to be a good leader?

I have found that a good leader is a good listener who keeps an open mind and is not afraid to ask the tough questions. The best leaders I've had the benefit of working with listen, inquire, and



New Austin President Chris Oddo with his wife Karey and children Harrison and Katie.

help set definitive goals. Then, they motivate those around them to accomplish the goals for the greater good of the organization. The leaders I admire are always evolving.

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What are your goals for the Austin Bar Association as you serve as President in 2013-2014?

I want to continue the work of my predecessors in advancing the integrity of the legal profession in accordance with the mission of the Bar. More specifically, my hope is that we achieve the following:

- (1) Increase membership and participation in our local Bar by educating our members and potential members about our association and its services;
- (2) Conduct a survey of the membership regarding current Bar projects so we can make any changes to our projects as determined by our membership;
- (3) Set forth a specific strategic plan in conjunction with the Austin Bar Foundation regarding the future location of our association offices; and
- (4) Educate, organize, and bring to bear the weight of our membership in support of a new county courthouse. Austin is currently the 11th largest city by population, and it continues to grow. We need a new courthouse to support the needs of our ever-expanding populace. • AL