

# GARRY REUTER

## Successful Successions for a Lawyer's Son in Metro-East Area

by Maureen Wilkey



BELLEVILLE—Garrett C. Reuter, Jr. is part of a legacy of success with an estate planning and corporate practice in the Belleville and St. Louis areas. He followed in the footsteps of his father, Garrett C. Reuter, Sr., even working at the same St. Louis and southern Illinois based firms as his dad.

Today, he still works with many of the same clients his father helped serve. Reuter never seriously considered another career path.

“I always knew I wanted to go to law school, and I had in mind that I wanted to be a corporate lawyer,” Reuter says. “I took a few classes related to taxes that touched on the topic of trusts and estates, and I knew then that I wanted to be an estate planning attorney.”

Reuter earned his bachelor's degree in accounting from the University of Notre Dame in 2002 and finished his J.D. at the University of Miami School of Law in 2005, where he also earned an LL.M. in taxation in 2006.

Reuter then worked in St. Louis for Thompson Coburn, a large law firm where his father had also practiced many years before. He started in trusts and estates, and after six years he moved to Greensfelder Hemker & Gale PC to work with his father, even co-counseling some of the same clients.

The two formed a long-term succession plan for Reuter, Sr. to transition his law practice to

Reuter, Jr. Unfortunately, just six months after beginning to work together, Reuter Sr. was diagnosed with cancer. He passed away almost a year later, which sadly changed their plan in a significant way.

### CONTINUITY BETWEEN GENERATIONS

“Very quickly, I stepped in and began servicing many of his clients and was able to use the things I had learned in our time working together to help them. I was very fortunate and grateful for the experience of working with my father, even if it was for a very short time,” Reuter says.

“I learned a lot through working with him. But after he passed, I still had a lot to learn about the business side of practicing law.”

From the suburban St. Louis town of Belleville, where Reuter was born and raised, he often works with clients he grew up around. Several clients with family businesses had a history with his father during the last generation, and they now entrust their business to him.

Joseph Trover, Jr., owner of Triple Sticks Foods, called on Reuter to help sell his former family business, Landshire Sandwiches, and then to start his own company. Reuter assisted with the sale of the business and the formation of the new company. He says Reuter's practice

is very similar to his father's, with Reuter, Jr. working hard to know every detail of his clients' businesses.

“He has a very business-friendly approach and is able to learn a lot about his client's business quickly,” Trover says. “He also assesses risks very well and tries to mitigate the risk in the best way possible without incurring a lot of legal fees. He has a passion for his work and really gets to know each of his individual clients.”

Trover's sister, Tami Lange, also started her own business a few years ago selling “Save the Girls” touchscreen purses. Lange branched out of the food business to create purses with a clear panel that allow owners to use their phone without removing it from their purse.

She knew Reuter and his father from her days working with her father's business, and she called Reuter right away when she wanted to start her own business. Lange was thrilled to see that he was visibly excited about her business.

“He was willing to listen to my ideas about new products, and he comments on my social media posts. It goes way above and beyond what a lot of attorneys would do for you,” Lange says. “He really takes a personal interest in his clients and their businesses.”

Personal touch and continuity between

generations is a hallmark of Reuter's business, as well as something valued at Greensfelder in Reuter's time there. He was grateful that the colleagues at his firm were so willing to pick up the mentorship process where his father left it off.

#### A PERSONAL PRACTICE OF LAW

In particular, his father's mentor and colleague of 40 years, Joseph Lowery, also a Greensfelder attorney at the time, continued to mentor Reuter until he passed away a year later. Reuter then committed himself to offering the same level of service to clients that his father and Lowery had.

"His level of service and his relationship with his clients is just as great as his father's was," says Gary Davis, one of Reuter's legacy clients from his father. Like Reuter, Sr., he continues to advise the Davis family on their family business and estate planning.

"He is very caring and mature. He is really doing the best he can to fill his father's shoes," Davis says.

That's not always something that comes easily to Reuter. Just after his father passed, he relied on mentoring and support from the other attorneys at his firm, and on all the clients who look to him as more than just a lawyer.

"It has been a real challenge over the past five years handling this practice and then becoming a partner in the firm, but the people at Greensfelder were with me through the hardest time of my life," Reuter says. "Just like my mentors, I want to be more than just a lawyer to my clients. I try to also be an adviser and a counselor."

Greensfelder has offices in St. Louis, Belleville and Chicago, so Reuter often finds himself split among the locations. But he works primarily from the Belleville office to be closer to many of his clients. Because estate planning is a very personal practice and because he has earned a lot of trust as an attorney, Reuter often finds himself counseling clients on more than just their wills.

"Talking about your estate is one of the more personal things you're going to have to talk about. You're talking about what is going to happen after you die. So, I often try to take a more personal approach," Reuter says.

"At a typical large firm, you would probably have someone working just on your estate plan, and they would refer you to another attorney for other things like taxes, business formation and litigation. With my practice at Greensfelder, I might be doing all of that for the same client, or at least helping with some part of it."

As part of his trusts and estates practice, Reuter works with clients on developing estate plans, tax planning, tax return preparation for individuals and fiduciaries, trust and probate



administration, premarital and postmarital agreements, and charitable giving.

In addition, because of the expansive nature of his father's law practice in Belleville, Reuter has branched out into other areas, including working with a variety of closely held companies and business owners, sometimes even serving as general counsel for the companies.

Having had business passed down to him after working with his father, Reuter appreciates the value of succession plans. So, he works on them with businesses.

#### SMALLER MARKET, SOLID REPUTATION

"Part of what I like about Greensfelder is the entrepreneurial approach I have been allowed to take when it comes to practicing law and growing my business," Reuter says. "At other large law firms, I might be bound to a certain path because of what other attorneys

are doing or other structures that might be in place. Greensfelder has been supportive of me building my business."

Building business and a reputation are especially important in smaller communities. Trover notes that his business likes working with Greensfelder, but they're very loyal to Reuter specifically because of their family history and Reuter's personable and business-friendly approach.

"St. Louis is a big small town. Everybody lives in the same towns and works close to each other, so if one client feels like they haven't had a good experience, everyone will know," Trover says. "Reputation is everything in a smaller market, and Garry has built a solid reputation."

Reuter's reputation comes not only from his family history in the area but also from his networking within the community. Over his years in the profession, Reuter has learned



Reuter and his father, Garrett C. Reuter Sr., in 2009

that estate planning is a very localized practice. So, by meeting potential clients face-to-face at networking events, he can build business a lot more quickly than he might through social media or online marketing.

"I'm a little old-school," Reuter says. "I think who you know and who knows you can be very important.

"When it comes to working on trusts and estates, people also want to see you and know you are going to be there when they need you. For example, even though I am licensed in Florida, a lot more of my clients are in this area because of the geographical constraints."

Although Reuter has some name recognition from his father practicing law in the area for so long, he has also brought in many of his own clients through networking and by expanding his reach in St. Louis and Chicago. Lately, he has worked on growing the firm's trust and estates practice in Chicago. With no estate planning attorneys currently officed there, he is trying to expand the firm's ability to cross-market itself into the city.

As part of his practice, Reuter has learned to adjust to changes in tax law. Recently, he has begun using his tax planning experience in different ways because the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act of 2017 increased the estate tax exemption significantly (currently \$11.4 million per person or \$22.8 million for a married couple).

He has also recently seen an increase in disputes once a person passes away, so he encourages his clients to write their estate plans in the most airtight way possible.

"Controversy and litigation is a growing area in trusts and estates law, so I always tell clients to leave as few decisions as possible in their documents," Reuter says. "We can never guarantee there aren't going to be problems after someone is gone, but the less that is left up to chance, the more you can prevent those bad situations from surfacing."

Reuter is licensed to practice in Illinois, Missouri and Florida. Even though Illinois and Missouri are geographically closer, until recently the laws in Missouri and Florida were more similar because of their adoption of the Uniform Trust Code (UTC). Illinois recently adopted its own version of the UTC that went into effect in January 2020.

"With Illinois' adoption of its own version of the trust code, we should have some more consistency between the states of my practice in the near future," Reuter says.

#### **METRO-EAST, ST. LOUIS ACTIVITIES**

When he's not at work, Reuter is an avid volunteer in his community. He is the secretary for Big Brothers Big Sisters of Southwestern Illinois and is an active participant in Belleville

CEO, an organization that teaches a select group of local high school students some basic entrepreneurial concepts to encourage their success.

Across the river in St. Louis, he serves on the St. Louis Sports Commission, a group that helps develop and attract amateur sporting events such as NCAA championships and Olympics qualifiers to the city.

Along with his sister, he also created a nonprofit charity, the Garrett C. Reuter Sr. Foundation. It holds a yearly golf fundraising tournament to benefit prostate cancer research and treatment at the Siteman Cancer Center in St. Louis. It honors his father's memory and his love of golf.

Reuter also attempts to help young attorneys every chance he gets, whether it's getting together for lunch or drinks or just having an open-door policy to help them deal with any questions they may have.

"I've now been practicing for 13 years, but sometimes it feels more like 10 minutes," Reuter says. "I'm just starting to see myself as an experienced attorney who could be helpful to those who are just coming into the field."

Reuter remembers feeling overwhelmed as a young attorney and wondering how he would ever work with the kinds of clients he now serves. But as he gains more years of experience, he's finally seeing some change in the way business owners and other potential clients view him. Now, he feels more like a peer instead of an up-and-comer as he did when he first began practicing.

"A lot of the networking I did early in my career is finally starting to pay off, as other young professionals I know are starting to move up in their careers and organizations as well," Reuter says.

When he's not working or serving the community, Reuter is a big St. Louis sports fan. He's currently reveling in the St. Louis Blues' Stanley Cup victory and getting out to watch St. Louis Cardinals games. He also has a passion for golf and likes to travel when he gets the time. Some of his favorite destinations have been Greece and Australia, where he studied abroad while in college.

As Reuter builds upon his father's legacy, he hopes the coming years will lead to greater development in both existing client relationships and new ones. He also looks for a continuing growth of confidence in his practice.

Though he is not the kind of person who plans five to 10 years out, Reuter would like to see the momentum of his practice continue to evolve based on his experience in the estate planning and corporate fields. He wants to keep bringing the personal connection he shares with current clients into the next generation. ■