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Local attorney marks a 50-year milestone

By: Lauren Otis , Business Editor



Staff photo by Mark Czajkowski

Kester Pierson in his Princeton Township office.

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In a profession where staying with the same firm for 20 years is considered significant, Kester Pierson is in a league of his own.

June 1 marks Mr. Pierson's 50th anniversary with the Princeton Township law firm Mason, Griffin & Pierson.

In June 1956 Mr. Pierson joined the firm — then known as Mason, Griffin & Moore — as a law clerk after graduating from the University of Pennsylvania Law School. After a nine month clerkship with the firm he passed the bar and became an associate at the firm.

"I was admitted to the bar in August of 1957," said Mr. Pierson, noting that may be the more significant anniversary, in August 2007 when "I will have been a practicing lawyer for 50 years."

Mr. Pierson, who will turn 75 in January, said there are no big plans to celebrate his golden

anniversary at Mason, Griffin & Pierson, where he co-chairs the firm's estates & trusts practice group. He will come in prepared for a day's work just like any other day.

Mr. Pierson grew up in Hopewell Borough and currently lives in Princeton Borough. His father and grandfather were town physicians in Hopewell Borough, and his grandfather was mayor of Hopewell Borough in the early 20th century.

Although he has had opportunities to leave the area and Mason, Griffin — he did serve as an assistant U.S. attorney in Trenton from 1959 to 1961, and briefly considered entering the corporate law world — Mr. Pierson noted that he never found an opportunity further afield that could compare to his satisfying personal and professional life here.

"From my perspective I think this is a wonderful place to live," he said.

It still is, although the changes he has seen over the years amaze him.

"I am still dumbfounded when I drive through Hopewell, up through Montgomery — the growth that has occurred, and only in the past 10 or 15 years," he said.

Mr. Pierson bemoans the density brought on by population growth, which results in tension over zoning and land use as well as other development issues, but understands how so many people would want to make the area their home, with its proximity to Philadelphia and New York, and its stimulating, intellectual mix of a community.

"Too bad we grew so much. That is just what happens when you live in an attractive area," he said.

Mr. Pierson has had to grapple with the policy implications of such growth first hand, having served as Hopewell Borough municipal attorney from 1967 to 2004 and Hightstown municipal attorney from 1973 to 1989. He also served as president of the Princeton Chamber of Commerce in 1969 and is a past president of the Princeton Bar Association.

The practice of law has also undergone a huge transformation over the years. There are thousands more practicing attorneys in the area than when he first started, Mr. Pierson said, with the expected result that there is less of a bond between attorneys.

"There was more collegiality. You knew a lot of the attorneys. I don't believe I know 10 percent of them now," he said. While downtown Princeton is outwardly quite similar to how it was years ago, much has changed there too, Mr. Pierson said. In the past he might recognize a variety of people if he was walking downtown, and stop for a chat with each. "It was just a slower, friendlier, more relaxed atmosphere than it is now. Everyone seems to be in a hurry now," he said.

Personally, Mr. Pierson said he bemoans the loss in downtown Princeton of what he termed "good quality men's stores" downtown, specializing in clothing. Now, he has to head to the big box stores outside of town for his sartorial needs, Mr. Pierson said. "It's progress I guess," he said.

Mr. Pierson's enjoyment of human connections, both professionally and within his community, may hold the clue to his longevity in private legal practice with Mason, Griffin & Pierson. At times he gained experience with corporate council and the judiciary but never was tempted to enter these legal realms, because they would have meant a reduction of personal contact from his work in private practice. And personal connections are plainly important to Mr. Pierson.

"I harken back in my liking for private practice and people to my father and grandfather. With patients you are dealing with individual people on a face-to-face basis," said Mr. Pierson, something he also does in private practice.

Mr. Pierson said he may consider reducing his work hours and commitments at some point in the future. "I'll probably retire in the sense that I am not going to be in working all the time. I will probably continue with a limited practice," he said.

In the meantime he will continue concentrating on the area of estate planning and estate administration, including drafting wills and trusts, and providing legal services to area executors and trustees. After all, "it has been a fun and enjoyable 50 years. I've enjoyed getting up and going to work. I haven't ever dreaded going to work," he said.

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