



Managing partner Shirley Reynolds (seated) in a rare moment of rest. She is surrounded by (L to R) partners Randall Fletcher, Vicki Ortega and Fred Kaplan.



BY APRIL TOSKER
PHOTOGRAPHS BY ROBIN STEELE



A Firm Apart

“Tough as a bulldog. Lovable as a basset hound.”

That’s how Shirley Reynolds, managing partner of Phoenix-based Hamilton and Reynolds LLP, describes her litigation style. For the past 38 years, H&R has been the Arizona legal community’s best-kept secret, but all of that is about to change.

H&R is a dynamic firm. A firm on the move. Its 8 to 12 lawyers pride themselves on the quality of their work and the quality of their life.

“That’s the way Bob Hamilton wanted it,” says Reynolds, pointing to the impressionist rendering of the firm’s founding partner, which looms in the main conference room.

The portrait itself is a point of pride for the firm—and a point of curiosity for



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visitors. Gazing into the middle distance, Hamilton carries himself as a battlefield general. The impression is aided by his being garbed head-to-toe in a Civil War-era Union uniform. That reflects his fascination with a piece of American history and his participation in re-enactments.

Lawyers at H&R smile as they remember Hamilton's growing fondness for wearing the uniform to the office. Reynolds recalls that, finally, Hamilton came to prefer being called "Colonel," and he once had to be restrained when he tried to "run through" an associate who made the mistake of questioning a decision he had made.

"The old coot," Reynolds says, recalling the old days.

Those days began in 1963, when Robert Hamilton started the firm with the goal of being the law firm of choice for Arizona's then-budding film industry. The firm soon grew and diversified with the addition of J. Emerson Joe in 1965 and Lawrence Frank in 1968. By the time Shirley Reynolds came on board in 1977, the firm of Hamilton, Joe, Frank and Reynolds, Ltd. was, as Reynolds describes it, "a boutique

firm specializing in a general practice."

The firm prospered through the real estate boom of the 1980s. Then, in 1989, Joe and Frank left—like so many Arizonans at that time—to try their hand at real estate. They were good at it, and, after just two bankruptcies, they have emerged as major players in the commercial development arena.

Though many firms would see the departure of named partners as a loss, Hamilton and Reynolds, as the firm then became, saw it as an opportunity. To this day, litigation from Joe and Frank's projects comprises approximately 40 percent of the firm's work.

Four-year veteran lawyer Larry Frank does much of that work. Frank—who bears the elder Frank's name but is not related to him—grins when he talks about the Joe and Frank lawsuits.

"I'm their statutory agent," he says, "so I get served with lawsuits all the time. I always ask the process server if I'm being served as statutory agent or because they think I'm Lawrence Frank, and they always walk away bewildered."



Soon before his 1995 death, Phoenix attorney Bob Hamilton photographed himself in the uniform he often favored.

A few reels of "Parched Earth" are all that remain from the firm's work with spaghetti-Western filmmakers.



Tragedy struck the firm in December 1995 when Bob Hamilton passed away. Oddly enough, however, he kept on billing through the first quarter of 1996.

"That's a funny story," chuckles Reynolds. "His secretaries were so accustomed to writing down a '3 received and reviewed' for every letter that came in, they just kept doing it after he died. Everyone had a good laugh about it, but of course we made it right. As soon as I learned about it, we transferred the time to other lawyers who were, in fact, living."

According to his wishes, Bob Hamilton was buried in a solemn ceremony on a dirt mound behind the firm he loved so much.

Though Bob Hamilton is gone, his legacy lives on. The firm boasts an impressive list of some 75 alumni since it began counting in 1998—not bad for a firm of only 8 to 12 lawyers. And diversity is still this boutique firm's hallmark.

Fred Kaplan, for example, focuses his practice on sports law and personal injuries. "The two are a natural fit," Kaplan says in his office filled with autographed sports memorabilia. "I've represented senior citizens who can no longer bowl because of an auto accident, and a high school volleyball player who missed the first half of her junior year season after spraining her index finger on a negligent-



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ly inflated ball.”

So far, Kaplan has not represented any professional athletes or teams. But that, he says, is just a matter of time.

Meanwhile, Kaplan keeps his eyes open for opportunity in the world of sports and sports-related law—even in the Super Bowl, the biggest venue of all.

“I didn’t even wait for halftime to end,” gushes Kaplan, “before making the phone call.”

“When Janet Jackson’s blouse opened in the 2004 game, America may have seen the end of civilization

astride a star-shaped accessory. But I saw a potential client whose story must be championed.”

Though Jackson’s representatives have not returned Kaplan’s messages, he is optimistic. “No one is bigger in sports and costume accident law—no one. She’ll call.”



ilies,” she says, “because they just spend too much time on non-billable work.”

One time the firm did commit everything to a cause was in 1993, when Bob Hamilton and then-new associate Vicki Ortega took what Ortega calls “the case of a lifetime.”

That was when Phoenix passed its now infamous “leash law,” requiring dogs and cats to be on leashes at all times. Hamilton and Ortega challenged the law as a violation of the constitutional freedom of travel.

They lost the battle, but the court of appeals gave a glimmer of hope in footnote 8 when it wrote, “We are not unmindful of the possibility that animals may, indeed, have certain rights.” That language continues to be cited by animal rights activists all over the country. To that extent, Ortega considers her efforts successful.

Clients walking into the firm for the first time notice right away that their every need will be addressed. Luxurious leather electric massage chairs, muted lighting, serene landscape paintings and large bowls of mints dominate the lobby. Soothing ocean sounds are played on the firm’s central sound system. In fact, the


firm has a mandated policy that every client must spend at least 15 minutes in the lobby before their appointment is taken. Reynolds coyly admits that this has a hypnotic effect that makes client control much easier.

“Whatever works’ is the firm’s motto,” she exults with pride.

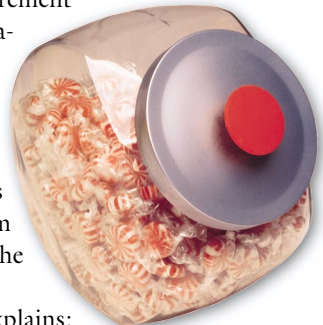
What does the future hold for H&R? Like many firms its age, H&R will soon face the retirement of its first generation, leaving mid-level partners to carry on Bob Hamilton’s tradition. But, as always, the firm has a plan for the transition.

Reynolds explains: “Senior partners like myself will cease practicing while continuing to earn the salary we earned in our last year of practice. This will continue for 10 years, after which we will receive a lump sum distribution of three years’ salary.”

Reynolds has every confidence the new leaders will grow their individual client bases enough to support the old-timers. “Just as we helped them develop as lawyers, they will support us in our old age,” she chuckles. “It’s simply a matter of loyalty.”

Bob Hamilton couldn’t have said it better himself. 

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The firm is prosperous, to be sure, but Bob Hamilton’s legacy is also a dedication to pro bono work. The lawyers in the firm spend an average of 150 hours per year handling cases for friends and family members at no charge. But, Reynolds notes, they are careful not to let that work interfere with the firm’s profitability.

“We really try not to hire lawyers who come from large fam-

Phoenix’s leash laws were the target of a famous lawsuit by the firm.