

ROB HELD

The Solid Individual You Want Protecting Your Family's Future

by John Toth

Robert S. Held has packed several high energy careers culminating in his current calling: U.S. Air Force Captain; commercial airline pilot; co-founder of Chicago estate and trust law powerhouse **Harrison & Held, LLP**; prolific author; bar association leader; and successful marathon runner. But don't expect him to come across with top-gun swagger.

"I've flown jets at supersonic speed one hundred feet off the ground and lectured on complex issues before large audiences, but those experiences were less difficult than having to talk about myself," he says.

What Held does display great passion for is

families of significant wealth. The firm also has a substantial litigation practice that often requires resolution of estate and trust controversies. In some estates, Held explains, "there are historical disputes that have never been resolved, and perhaps never can be. The clashes are emotional, economic, often bitter and spiteful."

Although Held advocates passionately on behalf of his clients and does not overtly mediate family disputes, he still keeps an eye on the human element of family disagreements and occasionally urges a client to realize that, as he puts it, "There will be a time in your

In many instances, the threat of litigation can resolve the dispute. In one case, the fiduciary was a personal companion who had lived with the decedent for years—but they had never married. The decedent named him executor, paying him liberally for those duties. The decedent's son was the sole beneficiary, and he sued when he found that the executor had inadvertently commingled his own and estate assets and made some inappropriate purchases with estate funds.

"The decedent's longtime lawyer brought me in to represent the executor," Held says. "We were able to structure a settlement agreement that included my new client writing a check for some inappropriate purchases, and allowing both parties to move on with their lives."

Then there are times when, as Held says, "Neither side will accept the other's interpretation or a compromise. You need a court as the final arbiter."

Held says that "briefing and oral debate over major issues are challenges I enjoy. For a litigator, it's an opportunity to excel by putting the case in the best light, marshalling the facts and winning over the judge. It's a great feeling to reach a good resolution when people need one."

'Best of the Best'

A substantial practice focus for Harrison & Held is estate and succession planning, and general business counseling, for high-value privately held, family owned companies.

"In doing sophisticated estate and tax planning, it's enjoyable working with clients who have family businesses," he says. "You are dealing primarily with a successful person and also with family members in multiple generations involved in the business at various levels."

Held enjoys the relationships he builds in working with families over a period of years. He preserves the confidentiality that many of his clients seek; one closely held family business that he counsels, Pabcor Management LLC and its associated firm Pabcor Equities, Inc., agreed to be included in this article. Pabcor focuses on property management in several regions of the country.

President and CEO Gus M. Pablecas calls Held "the best of the best," praising him as a



accepting and winning professional and personal challenges.

"I love my practice and my partners, coming in to work every day and doing everything possible to help my clients. The excitement of working on their behalf to get the best results for them makes it all worthwhile," he says. "The craft of the law, from routine paperwork to pitched oral argument, takes the same enthusiasm, tenacity and commitment required of an effective pilot or marathon runner."

'Still Your Brother'

Harrison & Held's practice, among other areas, encompasses estate planning and administration, particularly for individuals and

future when I may no longer be involved in the matter you brought to me—but your brother will still be your brother."

The majority of Held's estate controversies settle before reaching trial, ultimately benefiting the clients. Held recalls an individual who, suffering mental health issues, changed his will and trust right before death, disinheriting two children and mainly benefitting his new wife. Counsel for the surviving spouse took a hard line that the last documents represented the decedent's wishes.

"There was a lot of pain and angst," Held recalls, but he was able to craft an equitable arrangement with a significant cash component and future payment for the children.

lawyer “with integrity and who sincerely cares about our business and our family’s interest. He has proven it time and time again through the years.”

Pablecas explains why Held is an effective counsel: “Rob is one of our first ‘go-to’ guys who I trust and respect. He is smart, takes the time to listen, makes himself available, is disciplined, aggressive when need be and yet humble when it comes to his own accomplishments.”

Pablecas is echoed by Ted Arvanitis, vice president of operations for Pabcor Equities, the real estate acquisition, development and management company. “Rob is gracious, humble and accomplished,” Arvanitis says. “He is an excellent lawyer and a good friend. That’s not very common in today’s world, where most relationships are just a matter of business.”

Beyond his practice, Held authors numerous estate, trust and litigation articles for such publications as the *Chicago Daily Law Bulletin*, the *CBA Record*, the *Illinois Bar Journal* and *Trusts & Estates Magazine*.

“On the train, I take pleasure in writing or editing,” he says. “The challenge is enjoyable because of the substantial amount of mental energy that writing requires, along with the goal of achieving a timely, quality result.”

He also frequently contributes to IICLE publications and presentations and has taught estate planning at Northwestern University.

Held became active on the Chicago Bar Association Judicial Evaluation Committee out of his own courtroom experience.

“I was in a Cook County courtroom neither as counsel nor as a party,” he says in retrospect, “and saw a judge issue a rule to show cause why a party should not be held in indirect criminal contempt. While generally impressed with both the demeanor and knowledge of most of the judges I have appeared before, it was a tremendous surprise that this judge would simply ignore a fundamental constitutional principle.”

Held authored a *CBA Record* article about the necessary discretion in exercising judicial responsibility to, as he wrote, “wield the brute force hammer of contempt,” and now works with the CBA to evaluate the overall quality of local judges.

‘Tremendous Energy Level’

Few lawyers have pursued the unique career path that Held blazed for himself. After earning his pilot’s license and graduating from the State University of New York at Buffalo in 1980, Held entered the Air Force as a commissioned officer, earned an MBA, and served seven years as a military pilot, three of which he spent stationed in England with a fighter squadron that flew

during the 1986 raid on Libya.

Few lawyers, however, have the skill or stamina to pursue a J.D. degree as Held did, flying as an international airline pilot during law school and the initial years of his legal career. Based in Chicago, he flew passengers to major cities in Western Europe, leaving Friday evening and piloting the return flight on Sunday before assuming his associate duties on Monday morning.

Held began practice at Lord, Bissell & Brook, working closely in estate planning with Louis Harrison, who had taught Held estate and gift tax law at DePaul.

“Lou and I had similar ideas about how we could provide a high level of service to our clients, one that would at the same time bring more satisfaction to a lawyer with a business background,” Held says. “Lou was instrumental in my training, and in bringing the Harrison & Held firm to fruition.”

In 2003, Harrison, Held and partner Emily Kuo left to form their new firm, Harrison & Held.

The three of them are still together in a premier practice with more than 25 lawyers described by Held as “very high quality business advisors, banking and real estate lawyers, estate planners and litigators.”

“Everyone in the firm,” he adds, “is very focused on the results we can obtain for our clients. There is a tremendous energy level that emphasizes client service. We work consciously to be a collegial group, because that is the best atmosphere to encourage client service.” In addition to his practice, Held is the executive partner, involved in all facets of the business of the firm.

Beyond the law, Held has competed in 11 marathons—including three Boston Marathons—and is preparing for October’s Bank of America Chicago Marathon.

“Marathon training produces powerful endorphins, but I couldn’t be successful without the support of my wife, Sue, who is a runner also,” he says.

The couple has two children, a daughter who will be applying to law school and is working on her master’s degree at Loyola University Chicago and a son in his first year of law school at Illinois. Held did not urge his kids to attend law school; instead, he says proudly, “They too enjoy challenges.” It’s obviously a trait that runs in the family. ■