

Former Barley Snyder partner Jim Murray passes away

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It is with great sadness that Barley Snyder recognizes the passing of James "Jim" Murray, a founding partner of Miller & Murray, a Reading-based law firm that merged with Barley Snyder in 1999. Murray, 88, died Friday at Reading Hospital & Medical Center.

A lifelong Berks County resident and active community volunteer, Murray was a lawyer for six decades and founded his practice in the mid-1960s. At the practice, he built his glistening reputation on being an empathetic gentleman to his clients, someone who could be trusted at times when families often are at their most vulnerable.

His peers and friends respected and liked him because of the integrity he brought to his practice and his personal cases. On top of the professional integrity he carried, he also was a popular boss as a partner who was always looking out for his staff, someone who was easy to get along with, had a great sense of humor and almost always could be seen smiling.

"He was very likeable and easy to get along with," said Greg Young, a partner in Barley Snyder's Reading office who had been working with Murray since 1976. "He had a very outgoing personality, and related really well to people, which was one of the reasons he developed and maintained such a successful estates and trust practice."

A dedicated community servant and friend to the law, he had served as a president of the Berks County Bar Association and always was open to helping a young lawyer. An avid traveler to places like Bermuda, he also served on the board of directors for the former Conestoga Telephone and Telegraph Co. in his hometown of Birdsboro. At the time of his retirement in 2013, he was an of counsel member of Barley Snyder - 60 years after he graduated from Dickinson College School of Law in Carlisle in 1953.

"He was a gentleman," said Bill Colby, a partner in the Reading office of Barley Snyder and more importantly, Murray's son-in-law. "He carried that same gentlemanly way until the day he stopped practicing. When you were dealing with Jim and he said you had a deal, you had a deal."

Colby said about eight years ago when Murray was 80, the two traveled five hours to see Colby's daughter run in an invitational high school cross country meet in Virginia. It was an extremely hot day, Colby remembered, and at the end of the race, Colby's daughter and Murray's granddaughter collapsed and had to be rushed to a local hospital.

"Jim didn't panic for a second," Colby said. "It was his granddaughter, we're five hours from home, it was incredibly hot, Jim is 80 years old, and here he was doing anything he could to help. That was the kind of guy he was."

Brian Ott had the good fortune to count Murray as a mentor, coming under his tutelage as a summer associate in 1986 after Ott's second year at law school. The next year, he joined Murray's firm as a full-time attorney.

Ott said the most important thing Murray taught him was how to connect and interact with clients in the often emotionally taxing practice area of estate planning.

"It's a highly personal practice," Ott said. "You're working with people on fundamental issues of life, hope and aspirations. He was able to work with a wide variety of clients in a very gracious, respectful manner. He was very much client-oriented in the sense that he had understanding and compassion for the issues the clients faced, and he had a tremendous ability to empathize. It was never a sterile, emotionally detached situation with Jim."

His clients, Ott said, continue to appreciate that even though he fully retired three years ago.

"He left an inordinate amount of goodwill with his clients. To this day, the clients who worked with him invariably still ask me how he is, to give him their regards, and tell me their fond memories of working with him," he said. "He was very friendly, unassuming, and he was very approachable. He always liked a good joke and enjoyed the company of others."

Barley Snyder Managing Partner Jeff Lobach said the firm is indebted to its founders, like Murray, for shaping what the firm is today and having the vision to build a regional force.

"A fine lawyer, respected and highly regarded by colleagues and clients, Jim was, first and foremost, in all senses a gentleman," Lobach said. "He epitomized the courtly gentility of his generation at the bar, while at the same time retaining the capacity to be tough when his clients' interests required it. Inside the firm, I always found him to be pleasant, cheerful and accommodating. Jim will be missed and long remembered."