

LAW WEEK

COLORADO

Lawyers *of the* Decade



CALL US CRAZY. *Law Week* recently set out to recognize a handful of Colorado lawyers as “Lawyers of the Decade,” a fool’s errand, given the plethora of high-quality candidates to be considered. But we had help. After we gathered dozens of nominations from *Law Week* readers, we were aided by a selection panel that consisted of three current or past chairs of the Denver Bar Association’s Seniors Committee: **Don McMichael, Bob Fullerton and Jim Bayer.** McMichael practiced for many years as a trusts and estates lawyer. Fullerton, a former Denver District Court judge, received the DBA’s judicial excellence award in 1987. Bayer, a respected family law attorney, has practiced for decades with Bayer & Carey. With their help, and knowing that others could come up with a list of 10 different but equally deserving lawyers, we decided upon **Rich Baer, Michael Burg, Stacy Carpenter, Steve Farber, Cole Finegan, Jim Lyons, John Moye, Jim Mulligan, Michael O’Donnell and C. Jean Stewart.** Photo by **Jamie Cotten.**

Michael O’Donnell

By **Ali McNally**
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DENVER — A look or perhaps a long gape at the last decade of Mike O’Donnell’s national litigation practice of 32 years takes so long, his firm’s website dates them only to 2004.

But here’s a rundown: In addition to co-founding in 1998 Denver law firm Wheeler Trigg O’Donnell (then Wheeler Trigg Kennedy), O’Donnell has since served as its chairman; represented Fortune 100 companies; earned spots in the national American College of Trial Lawyers and was the seventh Colorado Defense Lawyers Association member to receive an award from the Colorado Trial Lawyers Association for professionalism.

Perhaps that’s why colleagues say one of O’Donnell’s greatest weapons in the courtroom is his ability to befriend the other side.

When first taking on a case, “One of the first things he does is call the other attorney to introduce himself and say, ‘I’m looking forward to working with you,’” Jack Trigg said. “You’d be amazed at how many fights don’t have to occur if you approach a case in that fashion. It’s a benefit to the client and particularly unique in this day in age where many attorneys think they have to be aggressive.”

That philosophy in the courtroom has been praised by clients as well.

“One of the key points of Mike getting great results is he’s phenomenal with people,” said Debra Minott, vice president and general counsel at medical device company Hill-Rom in Indianapolis, and also a former client. “He builds great relationships with judges and opposing counsel. He handles litigation without having to be a jerk. He builds relationships and in the



end, his clients come out very pleased with the results.”

Many of those relationships date to his law school days at the University of Denver, when he first met Bob Holmes, chair of the commercial real estate department at Denver-based Holme Roberts & Owen. They met through their future wives. O’Donnell is still married to Brett today, and they have three adult children.

“Mike and I met in law school at DU in the late 1970s and attended each other’s weddings in the fall after graduation [in

1979],” Holmes said. “We’ve been good friends ever since. ... Mike is one of the few people that I’ve known for over 30 years who I’ve always liked and respected as an individual, as a business person, as an attorney. I’ve never known anything that would weaken my resolve in those convictions.”

O’Donnell’s resume inside the courtroom rivals the one outside. He’s served on a number of local and national boards, with the most current being the Denver Police Foundation, Catholic Charities of Denver, the Colorado Judicial Institute and the

Walking for Kids Foundation, which helps raise money for cerebral palsy nonprofits.

O’Donnell also founded in 2005 the WTO Foundation, which raises money for local charities from all levels of the firm. Employee donations are matched, and employees are encouraged to volunteer time in addition to dollars.

“I think it’s a great idea because it involves not just the top, but also the members of the firm,” Trigg said. “We’ve had great success because of that involvement.” •

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