



Remembering Paul C. Jessen

Paul Jessen was a devoted husband, father, and grandfather, a highly respected attorney, a trusted colleague, and a very dear friend to many people throughout Omaha and the region. It is with sadness and a deep measure of gratitude that we bid him farewell.

From his childhood on, Paul thoroughly enjoyed the outdoors and the time he was able to spend hunting, fishing, and riding horses with family, friends, and clients. The mallard duck suspended overhead in his office was a familiar reminder of many hunting trips, and all who met with Paul in his office got to listen to country music (usually the twangy kind) playing on the radio in the background. Paul was just as comfortable in a boardroom as he was in a duck blind, and some of his strongest relationships were forged not over conference room tables, but instead in the great wide open.

Paul did not originally intend to be an attorney. He earned his bachelor's degree from the University of Nebraska at Lincoln and took the CPA exam shortly before he graduated. He decided to go to law school at Creighton to get some additional training while he was working for an accounting firm. Paul then decided to take one summer off to clerk at one of Omaha's top law firms and thankfully determined during that summer that his future was in the practice of law, where he could incorporate his tax and accounting background into his legal practice.

When Paul decided to leave another law firm to help start Koley Jessen 24 years ago, he didn't specifically intend or expect that the firm would grow from seven to over 50 attorneys and over 100 total employees to become one of the top law firms in Nebraska and the region. His initial vision was a small office where he would help clients with estate plans and where he could bring his dog to work every day. At first, Paul's vision stayed intact as he and six other attorneys set up shop in 2,500 square feet of space in Omaha's Old Mill business park and opened for business February 1, 1988. However, as Koley Jessen's loyal client base and the breadth and sophistication of their legal needs grew, the firm also grew and soon thereafter moved to its current location at One Pacific Place.

One of the first to arrive at the office each day, usually well before the sun was up, Paul would take advantage of the quiet to make or update a list of what he wanted to accomplish that day, knowing that leading a growing and dynamic law firm and fulfilling – no, exceeding – the expectations of his clients and community meant that the rest of his day would be given to others. The standard that Paul set for conducting business with unwavering integrity, putting people first, providing over-the-top client service, and giving back to the community attracted people – clients, attorneys, and staff members – to Koley Jessen.

Though Paul never really believed in “selling” legal services, clients took to his confident, straightforward, and friendly delivery of legal advice and trusted him to take care of whatever they needed. Paul believed that if you provided outstanding service to your clients, you would retain them, and your work and reputation would attract new clients.

Paul was highly regarded in the legal community. He received numerous honors and certifications and was a fellow of the American College of Estate and Trust Counsel and the Nebraska State Bar Foundation. He was recognized many times by Best Lawyers in America and Chambers USA for his work in tax law, trusts and estates, corporate compliance law and corporate governance law. He was a member of the Nebraska, Omaha and American Bar Associations, the Nebraska Society of Certified Public Accountants, the Omaha Estate Planning Council and was a past president of the Great Plains Federal Tax Institute.

Just as he advised others to do, Paul gave his time and personal funds to community organizations about which he was passionate. Community service was a key part of Paul's and his family's life and something he built in to the culture at Koley Jessen as well. Throughout his life Paul held top positions within several community organizations including College World Series of Omaha, Inc., River City Rodeo and Stock Show, Knights of Aksarben, and the Omaha Community Foundation. He was a key advisor to these and many other organizations. Many of those with whom he worked considered his counsel irreplaceable, particularly when complex issues arose. In 2011, Paul served as chairman of the River City Rodeo and Stock Show. Under his leadership, the rodeo set new records for attendance. Paul also played a key role in the successful renewal of Omaha's 25-year contract with the NCAA to continue to host the College World Series in Omaha at the new TD Ameritrade Park.

Paul's passion and dedication to his profession was unmatched, yet his greatest pride was his family, which includes his best friend and the love of his life, Mary, and his daughter Kjirsten (married to Joe Finnegan) and son Chad. Paul's two young grandchildren, Nate and Bridget, were also a huge source of joy to him. Paul and Mary were partners in every sense of the word. They never tired of hosting family and friends, attending charitable functions, and going to CWS games or to the rodeo, including the National Finals Rodeo in Las Vegas. After searching for several years for just the right location, Paul and Mary built their home, the "Lazy PJ Ranch", north of Omaha where they could keep and ride their horses and where Paul could display some of his big game trophies from his many years of hunting.

After their move to the ranch, Paul designed the "Lazy PJ" brand, which featured a "P", an "M" and a "J" in a circle, and Paul would brand wood carvings and leather goods and give them as gifts to friends and family. The Lazy PJ brand symbolized many things to Paul and Mary, and they displayed it proudly. Paul often said that keeping your personal brand – your reputation – intact was critical, and felt that you must act with integrity, honesty, compassion, and generosity in life and in business in order to maintain it. Most people who knew Paul would "ride for his brand," while he reserved that designation for those who could come close to matching his standards.

Every one of us at Koley Jessen and thousands of people in Nebraska and across the country were touched by Paul in some way. Paul will always be remembered as a man who "walked the walk", led by example, and who has made all of the people and organizations that he knew and served better. He leaves a legacy that will live on.

So long, Paul. Ride well. Thanks for everything.

KOLEY ■ JESSEN

ATTORNEYS