

# TED NIEMANN

## Clients and Community Benefit from Family-Instilled Work Ethic.

by Josh Weinhold

QUINCY—Ted M. Niemann picked up a lot from his family.

As a boy, he helped out on a pony farm business owned by his father, uncle and grandfather, where he says he developed a strong work ethic, a desire to succeed and an appreciation for living in a smaller community.

During his childhood, as he watched his father expand the family grocery store company and his mother take care of the home, he says he learned even more about the importance of working hard and the value of an education.

“I saw what it took and the kind of effort my mom and dad put forth,” says Niemann, a partner at **Schmiedeskamp, Robertson, Neu & Mitchell LLP** in Quincy. “That was a big part of my growing up.”

The long hours he spent as a youth working alongside his relatives also helped instill a

farm and in their grocery stores throughout high school and college, Niemann said by the time he hit eighth grade, he knew he wanted to be a lawyer.

It fit with his interest in politics and some of his natural skills, he says, but it also presented a way to distinguish himself from the rest of his relatives.

One of eight children, Niemann says he had an interest in working in the family business, but he knew he would have some competition, given the number of siblings and cousins involved in the operations.

His assessment was proved prescient. Two of the Niemann brothers now serve as the CEO and CFO of the retail grocery store company, which has 100 franchised grocery and convenience stores spread throughout multiple states.

The study of law, though, proved to have

He came back home in 1983 to join the general practice law firm of Schmiedeskamp, Robertson, where the partners asked him to begin working on civil litigation and business transactions.

Eventually, though, the types of cases coming to the firm led him to drop the trial work and focus more on business asset acquisitions, commercial banking, and corporate and real estate deals.

Within the first five years of his practice, the family’s grocery operations also began to develop significantly. Niemann now handles acquisitions and mergers, real estate transactions and financing issues for the company.

He also tackles a wide variety of contractual issues for his family’s company and other corporations. Those include manufacturers of truck bodies, tires and wheels and compressors, a local university, a hospital and several banks.

Niemann says his day-to-day activities typically focus on business-type transactions that include negotiations, document preparation and review, due diligence review and transaction closings.

Occasionally, he handles other commercial issues that pop up. They might include a client’s environmental concern or the licensing of a client’s intellectual property.

He also has performed extensive work with clients involved in the agriculture industry, including one company that manufactures feed and sells livestock throughout the U.S.

That client, one of the first large corporations he represented early in his career, helped him grow significantly as an attorney, Niemann says.

Working with an entity that sold products across the country, he says, presented all sorts of challenging and interesting issues. And he learned quickly that such a client wants an attorney who can quickly answer even the most difficult questions.

“They want to know both sides, the ups and downs of an issue, but they also want a recommendation from you,” he says. “I grew as a lawyer and gained confidence and realized clients expect you to explain not only the benefits and risks involved, but to also make a recommendation as to a legal course of action.”

Perhaps Niemann’s most formative experience, however, came when he helped one of his clients secure a \$99 million loan secured by real estate and other forms of collateral in several states. The deal developed



desire to return to his hometown of Quincy, he says, and join the family business after completing his education.

Now, Niemann, 55, works on a host of legal issues for his family’s company, Niemann Foods Inc., while also handling business acquisitions, real estate, commercial, banking and corporate legal issues for a host of other clients.

“My motto has always been to do whatever it takes to get the job done right and correctly,” he says. “If you do that, you’re going to end up solving the problem and the client’s going to get a good result.”

### Finding Niche Among Relatives

Though he worked on his family’s pony

plenty of personal appeal, he says.

“I liked accomplishing things, solving problems,” Niemann says. “That’s what a lawyer is — a problem solver. I knew it was a profession that would lend itself to my skills.”

So Niemann headed off to the University of Illinois to study economics as an undergraduate, then went to DePaul University College of Law. He enjoyed the big city, clerking for a judge and some law firms there, but says he ultimately knew his real future awaited him in Quincy.

“I realized I liked the smaller town and it’s where my roots are,” he said. “I knew I would be able to get involved with the family business — and Quincy has a great quality of life.”

at the busiest time of year for transactions work, he says, and didn't really start moving until the final week of December.

Niemann coordinated the efforts of the paralegals, various assistants and the other attorneys involved. The group worked day and night to develop the deal, including a single conference call lasting for eight hours. Eventually, it all came together.

"It was hard to get your arms around it," he says. "But once we got on task there, we were able to focus and decided how to prioritize everything. You have to do that in order to close a large transaction in a short amount of time."

### **That 'Hard-to-Find' Type**

Though Niemann says his most important skills \_ thoroughness, work ethic and drive \_ were formed during his early years, they still benefit him today.

Delmer R. Mitchell, chairman of Schmiedeskamp, Robertson, says he saw the Niemann family's work ethic on display on a daily basis because he lived in the same neighborhood and watched Ted grow up.

Niemann is an extremely dependable attorney, Mitchell says, someone he always knows he can ask to do whatever the firm needs. While extremely disciplined and hard working, Mitchell says Niemann also is very conscientious and continually strives to make sure his clients get his best effort.

"He's the kind of person that a law firm can always use and the type of person we're looking for," Mitchell says. "We still look for that type of individual. They're hard to find."

William G. Keller Jr., the firm's managing partner, says he appreciates Niemann's work ethic for several reasons, including a selfish one. Since Niemann is always the first person in the office each morning, he makes a pot of coffee. That means it is ready and waiting when Keller arrives, he says.

Niemann does everything well, Keller says, but his real estate work especially benefits from his determination and drive.

"He doesn't like to leave very many rocks unturned," Keller says. "He's a very detailed person and he tries to look at everything from all different angles and get it right."

Niemann's firm, established in 1914, wants its attorneys to be involved in the community, an idea Niemann says he truly appreciates.

He serves as the president of the Quincy Park Foundation and is the past president of the Rotary Club of Quincy, the Rotary Foundation of Quincy, the Quincy Regional Crime Stoppers and a group now known as Cornerstone Foundation for Families. He also was a member of the Two Rivers Council of Girl Scouts board and assisted in numerous fund drives for local charities and schools.

He is a member of the Illinois State Bar Association's Real Estate Law Section Council, a group that organizes and presents seminars and proposes and reviews legislation related to his practice area.

"You can really make a difference in peoples' lives when you get involved, whether it's fundraising or on a board," Niemann says.

When away from work and community activities, Niemann says he enjoys horseback riding, skiing and exercising as well as spending time with his wife, Suzanne, and three daughters, Genevieve, Celeste and Angelica.

But at the office, whether he's working on an eight-figure loan or a small file, Niemann says he aims to do whatever it takes to achieve a good result for each client.

"It's a profession, so you do what you need to do in order to make sure you get the result the client is seeking," he says. "If that involves staying up half the night, working the weekend or bringing in others, you do that in order to get your clients the result they're seeking." ■