

# BOB BOEYE

## Honesty and Integrity Are the Hallmarks of this Labor and Employment Leader

by Laura Fletcher

MOLINE—After earning his law degree, Robert P. Boeye was in search of a job when the dean of his law school at the University of Iowa recommended that he apply for a position as a labor lawyer. Boeye protested, “Dean, the only labor course that was offered by the school, I never took. I don’t have experience or knowledge.” The dean replied, “Do you want a damn job or not?”

Today, more than 40 years later, Boeye (pronounced boo-ee) enjoys a sterling reputation as a labor and employment lawyer at **Califf & Harper, P.C.** in Moline.

“As it often happens with large corporations, I had a mentor,” says Boeye, recalling his start in the labor field. “So I was self-taught under [my mentor’s] tutelage.” Boeye’s mentor in labor law at Meredith Publishing—which produces *Better Homes and Gardens*—was named Kurt Schaeffer, and while the two worked together in Des Moines, Iowa, Schaeffer taught the young Boeye lessons that would resonate throughout his long career. The first and most important of these was to be patient.

“You have to know the tempo and pace of negotiations—when it’s time to settle and when it’s too early to settle,” notes Boeye. He has negotiated contracts and labor arbitrations throughout the Midwest for companies in diverse sectors of the economy spanning from manufacturing and construction to the service industries and public sector. He adds that the best negotiations are ones in which “the management walks away thinking they gave too much, and the union walks away thinking they got too little.”

### Mentorship Comes Full Circle

After returning to the Quad Cities, he became a partner in several law firms and eventually opened his own private practice. Soon after that, a young graduate of Creighton University Law School phoned him to ask for a job. The youth’s name was Arthur Eggers, and he informed Boeye that he had decided to become a labor lawyer. According to the Martindale-Hubble Legal Directory, he said, Bob Boeye was the only such lawyer in the Quad Cities.

Boeye was hesitant to bring another lawyer into his fledgling enterprise, but when Arthur said he didn’t care how much he was paid, that was “the clincher,” reports Boeye. In the years that followed, Eggers sat in with Boeye on countless negotiations and arbitrations, learning from Boeye to “identify clients’ goals and be unwavering in achieving those goals,” says Eggers.

“It was great for me,” Boeye remarks about the partnership. “I had no one to bounce ideas off of and Art proved to be the perfect person to work with.”

In 1990, Boeye and Eggers merged their firm with Califf & Harper, P.C., a 12-person firm concentrating on corporate law, labor and employment law, and estate planning. “The best thing that ever happened to me was marrying my wife,” Eggers says. “A close second was having my son, and third was meeting Bob Boeye.”

### Honest and Fair in Negotiations

Boeye began his career at Meredith Publishing representing management in negotiations and grievances with union employees, and he has played this role ever since, handling jurisdictional disputes between unions at International Telephone and Telegraph in Chicago, taming wildcat strikes in Illinois and negotiating contracts for the Associated Contractors of the Quad Cities. He has represented state, county and municipal governments in contract and interest arbitrations and navigated clients through the constantly changing requirements of the National Labor Relations Board.

Through all of this, Boeye has developed a reputation as a man of his word, the accomplishment for which he is most proud. “The unions respect that he does what he says, and if he says, ‘This is our final offer,’ this is our final offer,” says John Hass of Valley Construction Company, which uses Boeye as its chief adviser in negotiations with the Teamsters Local and other unions.

David Cunningham, a former union attorney who has negotiated with Boeye on numerous occasions, concurs. “If Bob told me that tomorrow the sun would rise in the west, it would be presumptively true.”

Boeye’s father was a lawyer and judge. From the moment the elder Boeye took his young son on a tour of the courthouse, walking him through the courtroom and chambers, the boy was certain he wanted to be a lawyer. “I thought law was...an admirable profession, an honorable profession,” reminisces Boeye.

The perception of lawyers was different in Boeye’s childhood than today. “The adversarial nature of the practice of law” had not yet evolved, and the practice was “a very civilized” and more community-oriented affair.

Boeye tries to maintain the sense of civility he observed in his father’s day when approaching what sometimes are highly fraught labor and employment conflicts. The effort is appreciated, according to David Cunningham. “I think Bob is the type of lawyer the rest of us should strive to become...I don’t think the lack of civility [sometimes found in the legal profession] improves the outcome for our clients. The focus should be on how best to get business done for the client. Seldom in any contested matter is one person clearly right on all issues. Generally, reaching a consensus, a compromise, can lead in the final analysis to a win-win.”

### A Fearless Competitor

Boeye attended Lawrence University in Appleton, Wisconsin, as an undergraduate. He played football and fell in love with his future wife, Ellen, a cheerleader and an aspiring math teacher. They have three children: Cynthia, also a graduate of Lawrence University and the University of

Iowa Law School; Robert, vice president of sales for a major home health care equipment manufacturer; and Daniel, who works with the Moline Metropolitan Airport Authority.

Boeye is a devoted follower of the University of Iowa Hawkeyes in addition to being an avid reader. He loves the tactical challenge of football and compares it to his passion for the law, from which, Ellen Boeye promises, “I don’t think he will ever fully retire.”

“I love the give and take that comes with solving problems between clients and unions. The circumstances are always different. It’s a challenge,” says Boeye.

Boeye faced one of the greatest challenges of his career in 2000 when a union representing employees of his client, RiverStone Group, went on strike for over six months. In addition to attempting to reclaim benefits and wages that they had lost in the recession of the early 1980s, the union wanted RiverStone to make an off-the-record agreement not to sell their quarried aggregate materials to a nonunion construction company.

“The main thing was our corporate philosophy, which is that we will sell to anyone who needs and requires it,” says Marshall Guth, RiverStone’s vice president of operations. Boeye filed an unfair labor practice against the union on behalf of RiverStone and ultimately the strike was terminated with a successful result for the client.

It also doesn’t hurt that Boeye is highly competitive, a trait he learned from his football days and honed during a brief period of service in the Illinois state’s attorney’s office as a criminal lawyer. Boeye met his fair share of high-profile criminal defense lawyers in the courtroom while still in his 20s.

Following that experience, he tried one of his first cases with the National Labor Relations Board. He faced a prominent attorney who informed Boeye that the young lawyer had “a bad case.” The dispute involved a trucker who had brought an unfair labor practice charge against a company that had fired him for his performance.

“He told me that he had never lost a case and that there was no way I could win.” Fortunately, Boeye wasn’t intimidated because working for the state’s attorney had matured him. “That added a particular pleasure to beating him,” Boeye says.

Boeye continues to use his competitive nature to develop winning strategies for his clients at Califf & Harper, P.C., in Moline, whether that means negotiations and arbitrations before the National Labor Relations Board and various other administrative agencies or simply guiding his clients with sound labor law advice. ■

