

Five questions with... Craig Bucki, Partner, Phillips Lytle LLP

Jul 7, 2015, 9:00am EDT Updated Jul 8, 2015, 9:52am EDT
Jane Schmitt | Copy Editor | *Buffalo Business First*

You were recently named Citizen of the Year by the Am-Pol Eagle in the law category. What does that honor mean to you?

Having valued my Polish-American heritage throughout my life, I was especially honored to be named the 2014 Am-Pol Eagle Citizen of the Year in Law. From my earliest memories of childhood, my parents, Carl and Deborah Bucki; my late grandparents, Edward and Victoria Bruch and John and Adeline Bucki; and my extended family instilled in me an understanding and respect for Polish culture, whether through celebrating holiday traditions, visiting Polish-American historic sites and churches on family vacations, making a pilgrimage to see Pope John Paul II in New York City in 1995 or attending civic events in the Polish-American community of Western New York. To receive that community's recognition of my professional work, both as an attorney and partner at Phillips Lytle and as an advocate for Polish culture, is humbling and rewarding. The honor ... would not be possible, however, without the loving support of my wife, Kate, and our daughters Colleen and Claire, who consistently afford me time to promote Polonia amid my busy law practice.



How deep are your roots in the Polish community in Buffalo?

I am a 100 percent Polish-American, and my roots in Western New York's Polish-American community date back well over 100 years. Seven of my eight great-grandparents were born in Poland and immigrated to Western New York at various times from the 1880s through 1907. From 1986 through 1993, my father, Carl Bucki, served as national attorney for the Polish Union of America (PUA), a Polish-American fraternal benefit organization based in Western New York, and my mother, Deborah, and my grandparents served as officers of various PUA lodges. I fondly remember accompanying my parents and grandparents to numerous PUA-sponsored conventions and events as a child. My mother presently serves as a director of the Western New York division of the Polish American Congress, a federation of over 3,000 Polish-American organizations counting more than 1 million members nationwide.

Describe your role as president of the local chapter of the Kosciuszko Foundation, which promotes a greater understanding of the Polish culture and arranges educational and cultural exchanges between the U.S. and Poland.

I collaborate with our membership to organize and sponsor lectures, educational activities and social events that focus on Polish culture and the Polish-American experience. During the past

year, for example, the Western New York chapter has co-sponsored an exhibition at the Buffalo and Erie County Public Library on the life of Jan Karski, who alerted the world during World War II to his eyewitness account of the horrors of the Holocaust; co-hosted a lecture by Dr. Piotr Derengowski on the participation of Poles in the American Civil War; and arranged for members to attend a Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra concert that featured Polish classical music. Based in New York City, the foundation also sponsors a Polish university professor to take residence at SUNY Buffalo each year, awards scholarships to Polish-American young people to study at the Jagiellonian University in Krakow and facilitates a program that allows American educators to teach English to Polish youth during the summer months.

Has your heritage had any impact on your professional life ... in the way you practice law?

My parents and grandparents consistently taught me, both in their words and by their example, that hard work was a necessary component of success for Polish-American immigrants and their descendants in Western New York, whether in law, business, medicine, politics or any professional pursuit. Mindful of those Polish-Americans' perseverance, I strive every day to devote maximum effort to achieve the best possible results for Phillips Lytle's clients.

What's the focus of your practice?

I focus my practice on litigation involving state and municipal government, public authorities and other quasi-governmental entities. In this practice area, I have prosecuted disciplinary hearings against public employees, represented political candidates in election law disputes, challenged the constitutionality of state statutes and municipal ordinances, obtained review of the decisions of state and municipal agencies in Article 78 proceedings and advised governmental clients concerning issues of governance and compliance with state law. I also devote a portion of my practice to representing business entities in commercial disputes and homeowners' associations in enforcing real property covenants.