

## **W.O.I.S.**

*Based on an interview of Leo J. Scolforo by Alissa N. Hudson in October 2013*

His license plate reads W.O.I.S., which stands for “Worn Out In Service”, a military stamp reserved for equipment that is no longer useful. But upon his retirement from the military in the mid 70’s, Leo was far from “worn out.” He spent the next 40 plus years practicing law; building his own home in The Plaines, we’re talking cutting trees, hewing beams and laying stone floors; finishing raising his family; and observing the transformation of the local community.

Leo Scolforo earned an undergraduate degree in Math from Holy Cross, started law school at SMU in Dallas, and went on to earn an MBA through the Marine Corp from George Washington in 1964. He then became the Assistant Comptroller Budget Officer for the Second Marine Division until his deployment to Vietnam in 1968, where he served as a Field Artillery Officer. When he returned, he finished law school in 1971 at George Washington, and a few years later retired as a Lieutenant Colonel, having served as Deputy Staff Judge Advocate at Quantico. He applied to be a member of the PWC Bar Association in 1972 as a military lawyer, and entered the practice of law full time in 1975. James Davenport was the president of the Bar at the time and the membership was approximately 50 members.

His first job was as an associate with the law firm of McGolrick, Bowles and Gallagher. They had their office on Lee Avenue at the time, along with neighboring firms Smith and Davenport, and Hoss, Murphy and Smith. Leo referred to it as lawyer’s row. Alan Shachter later joined the firm along with Bob Klima and Nick Capousis. As a new lawyer, Leo recalls various practice areas of interest; real estate, personal injury, mechanics liens, family law, estate work and court appointed work. He ultimately developed a basic general practice, which he continues to this day, and left the firm to start his own practice in 1979. He reminisces about the tradeoffs of affiliating with other lawyers vs. going it alone; overhead, healthy profit margins, what motivates attorneys to success... these were all part of the dynamics of firm life in the 70’s and remain so today.

When asked about who his mentors were, he answered without hesitation, Joe Gallagher. In their early days together, Leo’s office was across the hall from Gallagher’s and Leo said, “I must have asked Joe 100 questions a day for a long time. It took about a year and a half, and then you got to where you heard most of it before. Bernie Bowles was a great general practitioner and McGolrick was impressive with a jury.” When asked who he mentored, he said, “Wendy [Travers] gives me a lot of credit.” Wenda Travers affiliated with Leo fresh out of law school in 1979. Jim Baker and Gene Steffen also associated with Leo for a time, having worked for him at Quantico. He is now a solo practitioner in Haymarket, Virginia.

Land development, both residential and commercial, was a driving force in the local economy when Scolforo entered the practice of law. Outside forces can become game changers in any field, and this was the case when a landmark decision determined that real estate settlements were no longer the sole purview of lawyers, which opened the door for title companies. This change provided a challenge to any law firm with an emphasis on real estate.

There’s also often a case that serves as a bookmark in an attorney’s practice; one that has significance beyond its duration out of a heightened sense of duty to the client or the cause. Leo recalls a case from the 1980’s where two brothers were accused of killing a local shop keeper. Leo represented the younger brother, who was terribly abused as a child, and was receiving mental health treatment. Leo subpoenaed the head of county mental health services to testify during his client’s sentencing, only to be met with an objection stating that there was no authority to put on evidence for the purpose of sentencing in a jury trial. The Judge gave Leo time to find authority, but none existed at the time. His client got 15 years. Over 30 years later, Leo’s sense of duty and compassion lead him to still question the Judge’s decision and whether justice was done.

Leo liked the small community feel of Manassas in the early 70’s. It was a place where a handful of business owners would gather regularly to discuss local issues, and make plans for local development. A place where everyone knew everyone, worked together, and built lives together. He recalls that the area was quite rural at the time and has witnessed the coming of industry and technology, a changing of the guard in the power base, and tremendous growth not only in the population but also in the local bar association. Today, Leo still prefers the small community feel, which is why he lives in The Plains and practices in Haymarket. But he still loves the practice of

law, saying, "...the thing about a law practice is that at least once a week, you come across a concept that you've never seen before! That's the fun part of it!"