

JIM PULLOS

Willing to Work for Success in PI Practice

by Elizabeth Davies



Hard work is nothing new to James C. Pullos of Clifford Law Offices.

Whether it was bussing tables at his family restaurant during elementary school or repairing railroad ties for Metra during college, Pullos has never shied away from putting in a full day's work.

That's why Pullos expects to put in extra hours, do extra digging and be extra prepared. He's simply not afraid to outwork his opponent. His litigation practice at Clifford bears witness to that approach: Pullos has tried more than 50 cases to verdict and risen quickly through the legal ranks.

As a plaintiff's attorney, Pullos works on all types of personal injury cases, including motor vehicle cases, premises liability, medical malpractice, and civil rights matters, as well as other complex matters ranging from mass torts to sex abuse cases.

His work as a plaintiff's attorney contrasts with the 14 years he spent as a prosecutor in the Cook County State's Attorney's Office.

And it's a particularly drastic change from his job during college as a Metra laborer. His job was to replace railroad track and ties, putting in physically grueling 10-hour shifts four days in a row. It was as if, Pullos says, Metra was trying to tell him, "We're going to work you so you're never going to want to leave college."

The determination he honed while working at Metra is one of the things that first caught the attention of firm founder Robert A. Clifford.

"His reputation certainly preceded him," Clifford says. "Many colleagues, particularly those who had worked at the Cook County State's Attorney's Office, spoke very highly of

Jim's skills as a litigator, his work ethic and his caring about his clients.

"He is considered one of the firm's young leaders who can be entrusted with complex cases that require great intelligence, strategic thinking and dedication."

DRIVE TO SUCCEED

Pullos grew up as the youngest of six children, born to a first-generation Greek American and an Irish immigrant. His father owned a series of restaurants, so while other children might be drying dinner dishes at home, Pullos wiped down dinner tables at the restaurant.

"I was the world's youngest busboy, pushing a cart that was twice my size," he laughs.

But those early days in the family restaurant spurred Pullos on toward education. He enjoyed school and wanted to make his family proud. Indeed, he was the first in his family to graduate from college, and today he remains the sole professional among his siblings. He recalls a time when his father saw his resume and fully understood the success his son had achieved.

"I can't believe that's you," Pullos remembers his father saying.

That's perhaps because Pullos' resume is quite impressive. After a degree in history from Marquette University, he attended law school at DePaul University College of Law. He graduated with a certificate in taxation, was a Dean's List member, and earned CALI honors in State Constitutional Law.

"I thought getting a legal education was incredibly empowering," Pullos says.

And because he was looking to hone his leadership skills, Pullos also secured an MBA from The University of Chicago Booth School

of Business. He saw business school as both a personal challenge and the opportunity for professional enrichment.

"I thought it would add value to my law practice," he says. "It offered me a different level of critical thinking and helped distinguish me in a very positive way. It lends value to the way I think about cases here."

It also taught him leadership skills that have served him well through his career.

"Not only does an MBA give you some credibility, but you're also training for those management skills," he says.

Pullos has always been one to learn from those around him. As it turns out, he was doing more than clearing dirty dishes as the youngest child at his family restaurant. He was watching and learning, identifying the character traits he wanted to instill in himself someday.

"In a household like that, it's not always easy to be a leader," he says. "So, what I always strived for was to lead by example—by working hard, by being fair, by being reasonable. Those were the characteristics I valued in a good leader."

That's precisely what he has become, says Clifford, who has been impressed with Pullos' desire to constantly learn.

"He always wants to improve himself," Clifford says. "He is an in-the-trenches type of worker, and that allowed him to hit the ground running at Clifford Law Offices. He works every case to the just end.

"He is an excellent mentor for young lawyers, demonstrating that they can accomplish anything they set their minds to."

SHINING FOR THE STATE'S ATTORNEY

After law school, Pullos took a job with the

Cook County State's Attorney's Office, where he immediately began to shine. After rapidly earning his way to a felony courtroom at the Markham Courthouse, Pullos enjoyed success as a prosecutor handling many high-profile and serious felony matters.

After distinguishing himself on the criminal side of his office, Pullos opted to transfer to the Civil Actions Bureau where he quickly won three federal trials and was rewarded by being named a supervisor of 20 attorneys handling more than 400 cases in the State and Federal Torts and Civil Rights Division. Later, he became supervisor of the Labor and Employment Division.

It was a swift move up the ladder for Pullos. In the end, there wasn't a magic formula to his success.

"I always showed up," he says. "I wasn't afraid to work hard. I wasn't afraid to try a case."

Pullos' favorite type of case is one that seems unlikely to succeed but that, in his hands, becomes a winner.

That's exactly what happened when Pullos went up against the American Civil Liberties Union on behalf of Chicago police officers. He argued that it should remain illegal to record police officers in the line of duty because of the sensitive information discussed during investigations.

"I knew that was a difficult case," he says. "I never shied away from it. I liked the opportunity to face those challenges."

His time with the state's attorney's office helped sharpen Pullos' management style, as he found the approach he decided was most effective.

"There, I realized that everyone was pulling the rope in the same direction," he says. "I found that teamwork was very important to me."

LANDING HIS DREAM JOB

So, when the opportunity arose to work at Clifford Law Offices, Pullos didn't hesitate to join the firm.

"This was a place that was always on my dream sheet," he says. "Clifford Law Offices has always had a great reputation because of the caliber of attorneys here. The results they earn on behalf of their clients are outstanding."

And if he was going to make the move into civil litigation, there was no one he would rather learn from.

"When you look around the legal landscape, you look for people you want to model yourself after," he says. "At Clifford, they value a really great work ethic, and they value results."

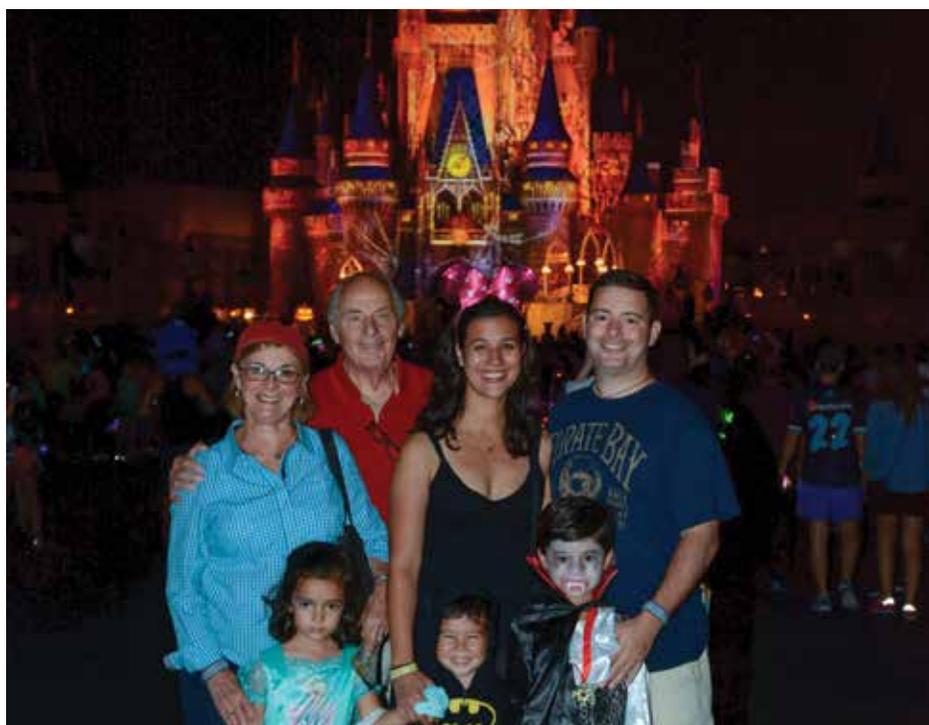
As it happens, Pullos brings both of those to the table. He recalls a case in which he represented a young man who was devastated when a motorcycle accident left him with permanent injuries. Things became even harder when accident investigators determined the



Pullos speaks on "Managing Stress as an Attorney" at an ITLA conference in March 2018.



Pullos and Kevin Durkin at HarrisMartin Bet-the-Company Mass Tort Litigation conference.



2015 Disney World vacation. Back row, from left: parents Anne and Jim Pullos, wife Maria, Pullos. Children, from left: Magdalena, Michael, Nicholas

accident was actually caused by Pullos' client.

"It was very troubling that the findings showed it was his fault," Pullos says. "I started really digging in on the case with the sole mindset of 'Can I find a different perspective?'"

Having been trained in investigations while with the state's attorney's office, Pullos spoke to witnesses and searched for video of the accident. With persistence, he found evidence that showed the accident from another angle.

"As a result of that, both carriers agreed to pay my client the maximum of their policy," Pullos says. "I was satisfied that I was able to use the skills I learned at the state's attorney's office to give a voice to someone who couldn't speak for himself."

It has, on occasion, been an odd transition from criminal to civil law. Pullos recalls defending Cook County Sheriff's deputies who were accused of civil rights violation under Section 1983.

"Up until that point, I was a criminal prosecutor. I was the one bringing the charges," he says. "Now, I was representing the officers, the ones being accused."

The court ordered the parties to remain on the floor as the jury deliberated. During this time, he spent nine hours with the officers as they waited for the jury to return. During that time, he saw the strain on the faces of officers whose fate was out of their hands.

In the end, the jury found in favor of all the officers. But the lesson has remained with Pullos since that day.

"It's that type of experience that has stayed with me," he says. "It gave me a unique perspective. You take what you do very seriously because it has real consequences on people's lives."

Pullos continues to live in the south Chicago community of Beverly where he grew up. His wife is an assistant principal, and he has three elementary-aged children. He is active in the fundraising arm of his school's foundation and plays recreational softball with other dads from the school.

As Pullos consciously shapes the remainder of his legal career, he's doing so with one goal in mind: to have a reputation as someone who gets results while working with integrity.

"I've learned to think analytically and critically about litigation," he says. "I bring my background from the prosecutor's office in understanding how to present a case. Similarly, I understand the defense framework and goals. I strive to apply all of that to the work I'm doing now."

"I love helping people, and I like the fact that I can make a difference." ■