

All in the Family: Hermina Law Group Finds International Success

George Hermina, J.D. '90, hadn't always planned to be an attorney, much less half of a successful legal team that boasts a prestigious international client list, significant victories and a surprising role in international relations since Sept. 11.

But thanks to prodding from his brother, John, who represents the other half of the legal duo that makes up the Hermina Law Group, George decided to take a stab at what would become a remarkably rewarding career.

The thought of entering the legal profession was far from George's mind when he first came to the United States from Alexandria, Egypt, in 1974. After settling in Troy, N.Y., he earned an undergraduate degree in computer science and mathematics in 1979 through a joint program at Russell Sage College and Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute. He continued on to earn his M.B.A. while working full time for the New York State Energy Office.

While his brother studied law at the City University of New York, George relocated to Maryland and took a position with the Maryland Public Service Commission as an expert witness testifying on financial matters. John soon moved to Maryland to open his own law practice, and he began encouraging his brother to consider law school as well. George wasn't quite ready to give up exploring other careers, though. "I had always wanted to work in the investment field," says George, whose next career venture was with the Washington, D.C., firm Potomac Capital Investment. "Whatever direction the wind took me in, I went."

It wasn't long before his brother convinced him that the legal field was worth looking into. John's practice was doing well, but handling both the legal services and the business end of the firm was all consuming. George had the business know-how to lend to the firm; what he needed was a legal education. "John is a great attorney," says George, "so I thought we could join forces." He enrolled in UB School of Law and kept his day job, commuting to the University at night from Washington, D.C., and juggling a wife and children all the while.

Upon graduation in 1990, George became a full partner at his brother's Laurel, Md., firm. Though the brothers practiced general law for the firm's first two years, they now specialize in three areas: employment and class-action employment lawsuits; international law; and business contracts and litigation. Among their biggest successes to date are a class-action lawsuit against Bell Atlantic Corp. in 1996 and the settlement of numerous age and race discrimination suits filed

against the Hechinger Co. in 1995.

While George and his brother have a very solid reputation among their clients in the United States, gaining most of their substantial business

through referrals from past clients, their international clientele is equally impressive. "We've represented many diplomats and we serve as general counsel for several embassies, including Kuwait and Egypt," George says. "That's the fun aspect of our job: We get to travel all over the world."

The brothers' Egyptian heritage is no doubt beneficial to the firm's international success. "We speak other languages, including Arabic," says George, who also serves as the president of the Egyptian-American Cultural Association. "And we're familiar with other cultures. It isn't all about the legal aspect. For example, Middle Eastern clients want to socialize first, instead of getting straight to business."

His knowledge of the Middle East has put George in a unique situation since the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks. International business has increased, as the firm has added more embassies to its list of clients. But he has also taken advantage of his cultural background in an attempt to increase communication and understanding between the countries involved. Both George and his brother have appeared on the Arabic news channel Al-Jazeera numerous times in an effort to explain the United States' reasoning for some of its actions since the attacks and why Arab-Americans have faced increased scrutiny in the past year. "It has become more of a public service," he says. "We're focused internationally, and we've become unofficial spokespeople."

"We don't want to be a typical law firm," says George. "We like our pace, and our clients become really attached to us. We decided to give up significant profit to work with our hearts, and the more we've done that, the better rewards we've received. We've been extremely fortunate."



George Hermina