

# REED ROESLER

## Peoria Employment Lawyer Fights to Defend Business

by Elizabeth Davies

PEORIA—J. Reed Roesler knows what it means to work in the trenches.

Long before he donned a suit and headed to work at Davis & Campbell, LLC in Peoria, Roesler wore a blue collar. He put himself through college and law school with jobs ranging from a road construction laborer to a power plant boilermaker.

Roesler also worked as a union plumber in his college days and recalls being particularly focused at one job, connecting a water main below ground.

“I was working a couple of minutes past noon and was chided for that,” he says. “I found it remarkable that there was this attitude that prevented people from being efficient and effective. I had never encountered that before.”

Now, it’s precisely that attitude that Roesler wants to help his clients fight. As a founding member of his firm, he focuses on employment law and represents employers in union claims, helping them maximize efficiency under a system that can seem like it’s doing the opposite. His cases range from charges of discrimination to workplace safety and non-disclosure issues.

Roesler’s client list ranges from Fortune 50 companies to family-owned businesses—and everything in between.

“While an expert in employment law, Reed understands that employment law involves people and that many times there is the need for balanced advice,” says client Royal Coulter, CEO of Peoria Disposal Company.

“Employment law is complex and frequently changing. Mr. Roesler is our expert, and he challenges us when he feels it is necessary in order to come up with the best results for the company.”

### FIGHTING FOR REASON

In the 15 years that Roesler has worked with Peoria Disposal, he has helped this family-owned business develop new corporate strategies, handled subpoenas on complex employee cases and taken on special projects.

“I have a peace of mind knowing the hard work he does for the betterment of our company,” Coulter says. “Isn’t that what any



leader wants—a peace of mind that we’re getting good, solid advice from a business partner who appreciates our passion for the industry and the entrepreneurial spirit for which this company was founded?”

“Surrounding myself with good advisers, like Reed Roesler, has been one of the keys to the company’s sustainability and success.”

Watching the success of his clients grow is the best reward Roesler could hope for. He most enjoys “delivering meaningful results to clients,” he says.

“When you win a battle but lose a war, that’s kind of a hollow victory. But there are times that, for a very reasonable price, you can solve a very big problem.”

Roesler has spent his entire legal career in Peoria but has used firm connections over the years to obtain a national reach. In a prior job, he came in contact with lawyers from the National Labor Relations Board, and it solidified the special niche he wanted to secure for himself.

“I viewed them as a different kind of lawyer,” he says. “They tended to be a people’s lawyer. They spoke differently, they handled themselves differently. I saw myself in that kind of role. The environment was one I understood.”

So, throughout firm changes in Peoria, Roesler has stayed committed to the issue that means most to him: helping companies navigate tricky employment waters. He measures success not necessarily by jury awards but by client satisfaction. Sometimes, he says, the greatest success is avoiding lawsuits altogether—“before they become nuclear wars.”

Over the years, Roesler has watched as unions began to fade. What once was a major component of his workload now makes up a fraction of what it did years ago. But through it all, Roesler has maintained clients by the way he holds their matters close to the vest. Even Roesler’s wife knows little of what he is working on. That level of privacy gives him “the ability to sit with decision makers and let them speak candidly.”

Client Harold Dahl, chief quality officer of enterprise business solutions for CliftonLarsonAllen, a national consulting firm, has worked with Roesler for many years. He relies on his legal advice in a range of matters, including one instance in which the firm needed to respond to a breach of partnership agreement by a prominent retired partner.

“Reed is both efficient in his ability to analyze our employment-related matters and decisive in his advice to our firm,” Dahl says.

## FRIENDLY DEMEANOR

Roesler is the guy who makes friends in the grocery store checkout line. He calls the cashier by name. He asks the court reporter about her family.

In short, he works to establish a friendly relationship with everyone.

That's also why he drives around in an old Toyota with more than 200,000 miles on it: to stay relatable and approachable.

"As a trial attorney, you have to be able to speak to everyday people—and that's needed in most workplaces, too," he says. "Being grounded helps you decode and present your problem. My success depends on developing rapport with just about everyone I come into contact with."

That's a trait that client Kevin Trantina, chief operating officer for The Parsons Company, admires in his lawyer.

"Reed communicates complex and sometimes ambiguous laws and regulations clearly in language that can be understood by people outside the legal profession," he says. "He is very good at tailoring his communication to his audience, whether he is speaking to the CEO or a first-line supervisor."

Trantina has been working with Roesler for the past 13 years and quickly remembers an instance where his company benefitted from Roesler's advice.

"The recent publicity surrounding high-profile cases of harassment in the workplace raised our awareness of the need to reinforce our employees' understanding of harassment and its potential consequences," Trantina says.

"Reed's knowledge, his communication skills and his down-to-earth approach provided the training our employees needed to ensure they understand their personal responsibility for complying with the harassment policy Reed helped our company develop several years ago. His counsel is always focused on preventing situations that could lead to litigation."

Indeed, Roesler spends much of his time offering human resources training. A workplace can be a particularly challenging dynamic, he says, when you bring together people with different religious views or abilities.

"A lot of what we do is training and raising awareness," he says.

Roesler advises managers to reign in their emotions and use the same techniques that successful parents use while raising their children.

"You have to be clear about your expectations, and you have to give warnings before you get to the point of delivering very bad news," he says. "A lot of problems in the workplace come from dealing with childlike behavior. Being a parent gives you greater insight into how to deal

with adults."

His outgoing personality also comes into play away from the office. Roesler is a past president of the Peoria County Bar Association. He previously chaired the boards for the Illinois Valley Public Telecommunications Corporation, the Center for Prevention of Abuse, and the Manor Vail (Colorado) Condominium Association.

Roesler is a member of the American Bar Association's Litigation and Labor & Employment Law sections. He is a past recipient of the Illinois State Bar Association Board of Governor's Award.

## BREATH OF FRESH AIR

Despite having a desk job, Roesler continues to work on his feet after all these years. While recovering from a knee injury, Roesler wanted a better desk arrangement. So, he wandered down to the firm's storage room, gathered a few boxes, and headed back to his office. There, he duct-taped them together and built himself a basic version of the en vogue stand-up desk.

Even now that his knee has healed, Roesler continues taking calls, writing briefs and counseling clients—all while on his feet.

"I don't have any back issues, and I feel so much better," he says.

A stand-up desk is perhaps not as surprising when you consider Roesler's active lifestyle. It's unlikely you'll find Roesler, 64, unwinding at a bar or movie theater. Rather, he clears his head by going outside. "It's the best antidote I've seen," he explains.

In Peoria, Roesler enjoys hiking—and he has plenty of company to bring along. Along with his wife, Pamela, Roesler shares a home with seven dogs and frequently fosters others. They have had as many as 15 dogs living in their home at once.

A lifelong outdoor enthusiast, Roesler attended college at Colorado State University, the same school that two of his sons now attend. The school seemed an obvious choice for this self-proclaimed ski addict who spends most of his non-working time chasing powder.

Still, Colorado wasn't the place Roesler wanted to practice law.

"I missed the Midwest," he says. "Here, everything swims with life. I don't hunt, I don't fish, but I like to cut the trails I hike."

His decision to return home to set up practice has been a rewarding one. He's found a niche where he can excel in a community rich with diverse corporate legal matters.

"Practicing in Peoria has been fabulous," he says. "There are good cases to be tried here, but I'm not climbing over the more pedestrian obstacles I would encounter in Chicago." ■