

Adam Chaddock

A Shining Machine in Med Mal Defense

by Elizabeth Davies

PEORIA — On the same date every July, Adam P. Chaddock gets a note from a former client.

“Thank you,” it reads.

The reminder of the medical malpractice case Chaddock and a partner won years ago comes to his office at Peoria’s **Quinn Johnston Henderson Pretorius & Cerulo**. He represented a surgeon who was sued for an alleged missed appendicitis. The surgeon, who was of African origin and had an accent, was more difficult for the jury to relate to than the patient, who was a college girl.

So how did he win such a challenging case?

“I think it was the attention to detail, the attention to the medical records,” he says. “My partner and I were better prepared than the plaintiff’s attorney, and we had better witnesses.”



In the end, Chaddock and his partner convinced the jury that his client was not at fault. His client went on to resume his medical practice and rebuild his professional confidence. Never has he forgotten Chaddock’s role in that.

Chaddock says that note reiterates why he is in his field of practice: “Because it means so much to the physicians.”

At 40 years old, this Peoria native has settled in well to a career he seems born to have. Chaddock litigates primarily medical malpractice, along with a share of construction and municipal work.

“My wife says if there is anything I was made to do in life, it is argue,” he laughs. “I have always liked to be able to fight for a position.”

Defending Doctors in Tough Times

No one wants to be sued, but doctors take it particularly personally, Chaddock says.

“I cannot count the number of physicians who, when I met them for a case, were (really) upset. Downright sobbing,” he explains. “It is such a personal affront to be sued when you tried to provide the best

possible medical care, then you are sued.”

Even beyond relieving their legal pressures, Chaddock tries to encourage doctors professionally.

“If I can look at the medical records, and I can talk to you, and I can talk to the experts, and I can still say I would let this doctor care for my child, I hope they would take it to heart and not beat themselves up over it,” Chaddock says.

He has, in fact, had two of his three daughters operated on by former clients. They are good doctors, he asserts, who just happened to have some bad outcomes.

“I truly do appreciate those who I believe were wrongfully suited,” he says. “There is litigation brought for bad outcomes that simply weren’t negligent.”

Chaddock went to the University of Illinois for both undergrad and law school, knowing from the start that he wanted to turn his debate team skills into a legal career. Medical malpractice was an obvious fit.

“I am a conservative-minded, defense-minded, guy,” he says. “So I knew I wanted to go to a defense firm, not a plaintiff’s

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firm. Law, and especially litigation, are a very good fit for me.”

Medical malpractice has given Chaddock the intellectual challenge he wanted. Not only does he need to know and understand a patient’s chart, but he must know the holes in the other side’s expert testimony. And, of course, going head-to-head with a doctor in his field of expertise is a fun challenge.

“That is when you are pushing yourself to be outside of your comfort zone,” Chaddock says.

But his absolute favorite place to be is in a courtroom, in front of the bar, before a jury.

“You are a litigator for those moments in court when you can be before a jury and think, ‘Wow. I nailed that,’” he says.

His early days at the firm gave him the opportunity to learn medical malpractice from the firm’s best: Murv Pretorius and Kevin Miller.

“Adam had a great advantage in his first 10 years because he could work with some really great lawyers, and he soaked it up like a sponge,” says firm partner Greg Cerulo.

Chaddock recently had a trial where he worked alongside fellow medical malpractice attorney Paul Estes of Peoria’s Hinshaw and Culbertson. Estes is impressed with the skill set Chaddock has developed at a young age.

“He’s always very well-prepared,” Estes says. “He’s very confident without being arrogant. For someone who is 40 years old, he has litigation skills that you don’t usually find.”

He also has the maturity to know which battles aren’t worth fighting.

“It’s his willingness to get along with others,” Estes says. “He is adversarial but not antagonistic. He would rather cajole someone into a position than beat someone into a position.”

Heyl Royster shareholder Mark Hansen has worked with Chaddock for about 10 years and enjoys having cases with him.

“Adam’s dedication and work ethic set him apart from his peers,” he says. “Quite frankly, Adam is one of the hardest working lawyers I know, he is always well-prepared and knows the case cold.”

Chaddock is particularly reliable in tough situations.

“Trial work can be stressful, and sometimes tempers run high,” Hansen says. “Even under difficult circumstances, Adam always treats everyone with respect. He is known for his professionalism and integrity.”

Putting in the Hours

There’s no secret behind Chaddock’s legal success. He’s a machine, pure and simple.

From the time he graduated law school,

Chaddock proved himself a hard worker.

“In the first four or five years of my career, I worked the hours you hear about in law school,” he says. “I worked a lot of hours with the big name partners on the big cases. It was a combination of my competitive nature — being the best associate the firm could have — and also being someone the client could trust. I was able to do those things, and do them quickly.”

It wasn’t unusual for Chaddock to pull all-nighters in those early days.

“If a partner was coming to me for work, I was going to make sure it got done,” he says.

In fact, his early reviews showed concern that he would burn out if he continued working at that rate. He laughed it off at the time. Now at 40 years old with three active children at home, he understands what they were getting at.

And so these days, Chaddock keeps a stricter schedule. He still is the first person in the office at 6 a.m. each day, but he makes a point of leaving by 4 p.m. so he can coach his daughter’s soccer team.

“It is a matter of being as disciplined as possible and having high-quality associates I can trust,” he says. “I feel lucky to have been at the firm I am and have the opportunity for early success.”

Chaddock isn’t pulling regular all-nighters anymore, either, and family time has become a priority.

These days, you’ll find him on the soccer field most weeknights, coaching for the 15-team school soccer program he runs with his wife, Sarah. It gives him a chance to spend time with his girls, Abigail, Lillian and Beatrice, who range in age from preschool to third grade.

He also serves on their school’s marketing and athletic committees in his free time. And he recently finished a three-year term as the first president of his neighborhood’s new homeowner’s association.

At the law firm, Chaddock’s early efforts were rewarded. He made partner at age 30 after just six years there. Previously he worked on cases with older attorneys. Now, he says, “I am just getting to the age where I have 60 of my own cases as I have gained experience.”

Among the older attorneys who have helped him along is partner Cerulo. “(He) taught me how to be a lawyer, but he also taught me to be a businessman and how to handle clients,” Chaddock says.

Chaddock’s hard work, intelligence and versatility have made him a stand-out lawyer, Cerulo says.

“He’s whip-smart,” he says.

“Because of that, he’s been able to work in several different subject matters. People

don’t typically cross over in those areas, but Adam is capable of doing that and has done that. What sets him apart is his versatility. It’s the rare young lawyer nowadays who can do that.”

In addition to winning medical malpractice cases, Chaddock is quick to take on municipal or construction liability cases. He is not intimidated by well-known plaintiff’s attorneys, and doesn’t shy away from big cases.

Cerulo is quick to remember an eight-day trial against a prominent personal injury lawyer from Peoria. The case was high risk because Chaddock was defending a construction company whose employee was injured on the job.

Chaddock offered a settlement, but the plaintiff’s attorney refused. He was very confident in a victory for his client.

So it was all the more satisfying when a jury returned a defense verdict in just 28 minutes.

“That’s hard to do these days because juries see this as a man at work — he was doing what he needed to do to make a living,” Cerulo says. “So it’s really difficult to find an argument where people can agree that he was injured at work, but it doesn’t make sense to recover against Adam’s client.”

Ed Dutton, director of claims and legal services for the Park District Risk Management Agency, has known Chaddock since going up against him on a pending appeal in 2009.

“I thought he did a very good job with what he had to work with, as the accepted facts and controlling precedent both weighed against him,” Dutton says. “Not too long after that, I retained him to handle the defense of a tort lawsuit against another park district that I also represented.”

Dutton has been particularly impressed with Chaddock’s understanding of the Tort Immunity Act, as well as his knowledge of legal and practical civil procedure. He calls Chaddock thorough, prompt, and a strategic thinker who has a nice demeanor.

“He has helped me with several cases,” Dutton says. “One that he recently obtained dismissal of involved a bicyclist on a paved path who rode into a bollard post that was well-marked, served a useful purpose — keeping motor vehicles off of the bike path — and was anything but hidden from view.”

“It took several arguments before the trial court ultimately granted the dismissal, and Adam stayed with the game plan throughout, while also keeping his patience.” ■