

MICHIGAN LAWYERS WEEKLY

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LEADERS in the LAW 2016

Howlett is chief operating officer at The Googasian Firm, where his practice includes catastrophic injury, wrongful death and consumer class actions. As immediate past president of the Oakland County Bar Association, he improved public access to legal services and developed a ticket sponsorship program to ensure all new lawyers can attend events. Howlett has been honored twice with the OCBA's Distinguished Service Award. He is a fellow in the Litigation Counsel of America.

What does practicing law mean to you personally and professionally?

What distinguishes lawyers who are deeply satisfied and who approach each day with great enthusiasm from others in the profession who find themselves trapped in a mill of stress and dissatisfaction?

It's not awards or big verdicts and settlements. It's not press coverage or renown.

In my view, the deeply satisfied lawyer savors the quiet moments of gratitude and lasting friendship with clients.

More than any particular result in any case, I continue to be motivated by the enduring decency and kindness of people with whom I have traveled in cases borne of tragedy and hardship.

On the train ride that is a career, I try to focus on understanding and enjoying the people who cross my path and join me for part of the ride. It's these relationships that sustain and enthruse me.

Where did you grow up? Please provide one memorable anecdote about your childhood.

I was born and raised in Oakland County. I still on occasion drive by with wistfulness the old house on East Iroquois in Pontiac where, until moving in 1970, we lived across the street from George Googasian, who I would join in practice in 1998.

Thomas H. Howlett

Chief Operating Officer, The Googasian Firm PC
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What do you consider your biggest professional accomplishment and why?

Serving as president of the Oakland County Bar Association during the 80th anniversary of the organization, which my grandfather had helped found when he was a young lawyer finding his way as a newcomer to Pontiac.

Describe the biggest challenge you've had to face in your legal career.

Practicing law in a state where legislators and appellate courts have significantly unlevelled the playing field is the biggest, ongoing challenge for those of us representing the catastrophically injured.

What is the best advice you've ever received that you've actually used?

My first job after law school was as a judicial law clerk for the Hon. Douglas W. Hillman, then-chief judge for the Western District.

On many occasions in the courtroom, Judge Hillman — renowned as a “trial lawyer’s judge” — would pull me aside in the midst of hearings or trials to whisper something instructive about what a practitioner was doing exceptionally right or wrong. I regularly apply this advice received from the bench 25 years ago.

Everyone has a “guilty pleasure.” What is yours?

Michigan craft beer.

You are throwing a special dinner party and you can invite anyone from the past or present. Which five fantasy guests, living or dead, would you like to host?

Bruce Springsteen and the E Street Band, after which I finally secure my long-coveted dream job as one of the band’s roadies.

How would you describe yourself in one word?

Steadfast.