

# THE BUSINESS REVIEW

February 1-7, 2013

10 MINUTES WITH...  
JONATHAN DEILY

## No recipe

When the recession drove Chrysler into bankruptcy, Albany attorney Jon Deily was there. Chrysler severed ties with 407 dealers. Deily's firm wound down 126 of them. He graduated from Albany Law School, but not without first dropping his woodworking business and dropping out of UAlbany. Deily hunts, travels, cooks without recipes and restores vehicles. Being a lawyer? That's the last thing he expected.

INTERVIEW BY ADAM SICHKO

### What led you to law school?

I never for one day intended to practice law.

This is how odd it is: I actually dropped out of the University at Albany. I never graduated. So I have a high school diploma and a doctorate in law.

When I was in college, I also had a woodworking business. I was starting to grow and getting to the point where I needed contracts; I had the sense I was getting screwed on a regular basis.

My brothers are both lawyers. They said, 'you can do the woodworking business anytime, but if you go to law school, you'll always have that background.'

The dean of Albany Law School admitted me, but probed me on why I didn't just hire somebody to handle my legal needs. I said 'I didn't think they'd understand my business.' That was naïve, of course. When you deal with a client, there's always two correct answers to every question. There's the correct legal answer and the correct business answer. They're rarely the same.

### Tell me about your parents. Both were librarians?

We had 5,000 books in our house, with a card catalog. We had a first edition of Alice in Wonderland. We had one of each of the A.A. Milne books, all first editions, all signed and numbered by the author. We had one volume of each book of Robert Frost poems published during his life, each signed by Robert Frost.

The second book ever published on moveable type, after the Gutenberg Bible, was the Nuremberg Chronicle. My dad had the map leaves of Rome and Genoa out of one of the first public sets of that.

We could read anything, as long as we washed our hands first.

### They weren't typical "school librarians."

My dad had five degrees. He earned his master's and PhD on scholarship at the University of Chicago. My mother went to Simmons College, so she's no dummy.

My dad could read and speak French, read Spanish, read Greek and Old English and Anglo-Saxon. He also spoke German. During the war, the military needed people to provide ... security for the German scientists on the White Sands [atomic bomb] project. He was part of the crew that transported refined uranium from White Sands, New Mexico, to Oak Ridge, Tennessee, where they actually built the bomb.

In the '60s, Rockefeller asked my dad to come to the State University system. He was put in charge of all the libraries at every state college and university.

### We're sitting in your office, an old mansion next to Washington Park. What's the significance of that?

After I bought the building, I brought my dad over for a tour. Up on the second floor, he got really quiet for a

minute. I said, 'What's the matter?' He said, 'This used to be my office.'

When he worked for the State University system, this building and the one next door were the original headquarters. In 1996, I bought his old office.

### You credit your mother for your cooking skills.

My mother insisted that none of her three sons would ever have to get married because they couldn't take care of themselves. She taught me so much that today, I don't need recipes. Pizza is maybe my best dish. My wife likes my pesto and shrimp. I prefer so-pressata, cheese and hot peppers.

### What was your first job?

My more memorable ones were working as a truck mechanic for a couple of summers. I also made money in college by driving a tractor-trailer. My route was Albany-Plattsburgh-Chicago-Los Angeles-Port of New Jersey. From Plattsburgh to Chicago, we were hauling a chemical used in manufacturing heart medicine. We'd bring frozen food from L.A. to New Jersey. It took eight or nine days to do the loop.

You were paid by the mile, so there was no profit in sitting still. It was me and another driver. Of course, in those days, there were two log books, too. So let's just say the restrictions on driving were honored in the breach.

### You can't seem to get away from cars.

I have a 1941 Oshkosh truck with a snow-blower on it, only 8,000 miles. It's a toy, probably one I didn't need.

I bought and restored a Porsche 928 5-liter, and I partially restored a 1952 Chevy truck.

### Speaking of cars: What was the tension like during the automaker crisis in the recession?

This was one of four firms representing Chrysler's credit company. The financial arm never filed bankruptcy, but the manufacturer did, and they defaulted on \$1 billion of obligations and used bankruptcy to terminate 407 dealers. All those dealers either had floor-plan loans or real estate mortgages or equipment loans. This office was responsible for winding down 126 of them.

People were legitimately ruined, done and out of business. The anger was directed at us. It wasn't their fault and it really wasn't our client's fault, but you became the lightning rod. Even the lawyers were getting hostile to one another.

It was my most emotionally draining time as a lawyer. You saw people who just couldn't make the transition.



### QUICK INFO ▶

**Jonathan Deily**  
**Age:** 62  
**Business:** Deily Mooney Glastetter LLP, Albany  
**Title:** Founding member and managing partner  
**Born:** Slingerlands  
**Resides:** Cohoes and Cape Charles, Virginia  
**Education:** Bethlehem Central Schools, Albany Law School  
**Family:** Wife, Jerri; three children, eight grandchildren

DONNA ABBOTT VLAHOS | THE BUSINESS REVIEW