

NOMINATIONS NOW OPEN FOR
2011 AT my.superlawyers.com

NEW JERSEY Super Lawyers[®]

superlawyers.com

2010

the TOP ATTORNEYS *in* NEW JERSEY

PLUS *Rising Stars*
The state's outstanding
young lawyers

SUZANNE CERRA'S BETTER WAY

Showing how it's possible
to grow a firm and have a life

30,000 CASES AND COUNTING

There's a reason why
Paul D'Amato is always so busy

SHOW JOSEPH LASALA THE MONEY

When software company AremisSoft
left shareholders holding the bag,
he went looking for answers

WALDER'S POND

Justin Walder keeps
a tranquil attitude during
turbulent times



THOMSON REUTERS

and the publishers of

New Jersey
MONTHLY

Justin Walder doesn't let winning or losing change his essential self (although he usually wins)

WALDER'S POND

by NICK DIULIO

photography by LUIGI CIUFFETELLI

Justin Walder's large office in Roseland has a spare aesthetic. He has some paintings on the walls, some family photos behind his desk. Nothing fancy. But one thing stands out. It's a shot of Walder with two of his adult children and two of his grandchildren at Super Bowl XLII in Arizona (he has three children, who are all lawyers, two stepchildren and nine grandchildren in all). You remember, the game where the New York Giants pulled off one of the biggest upsets in history and beat the undefeated New England Patriots?

"Oh, yes," says Walder, an avid Giants fan, taking in the photo. "That's a great memory."

And not just for the win. At 74, he's nearly 50 years into a celebrated career, but he regards winning and losing with a Buddha-like calm. Sure, winning is important. It's what he's hired to do. But losing also has its place. It's how we learn. If winning becomes the only thing, he says, a lot gets lost along the way.

"Every case is not World War III," he says. "I always tell the lawyers here, 'Remember, the other side of the case could have just as easily walked into the office.'"

This is the stuff of conversations with Walder, a man who has worked as a state prosecutor and now does white collar criminal defense work for Walder, Hayden & Brogan. He doesn't like to discuss his triumphs. He'd rather ruminate on the broader joys of being an attorney: learning new things all the time, giving presentations to a jury, problem-solving with clients. He loves it.

"My energy level, my interest, are as strong now as they've ever been," he says. "It's truly a lot of fun. And to be getting paid well and having fun at the same time—you've gotta feel pretty lucky."

AFTER GRADUATING FROM Rutgers School of Law–Newark in 1961 (which he attended on a full scholarship), he served as deputy attorney general in New Jersey. In 1963 he moved on to become assistant Essex County prosecutor until 1966, serving as the Garden State's chief of the division of economic crimes and fraud, before joining a small five-member firm that would eventually become the 30-member Walder, Hayden & Brogan.

He has served on numerous New Jersey Supreme Court committees through the years, and received dozens of distinction, including last year amassing the highest point total in the *New Jersey Super Lawyers* survey. It's quite a résumé. Just don't ask him to talk about any of it.

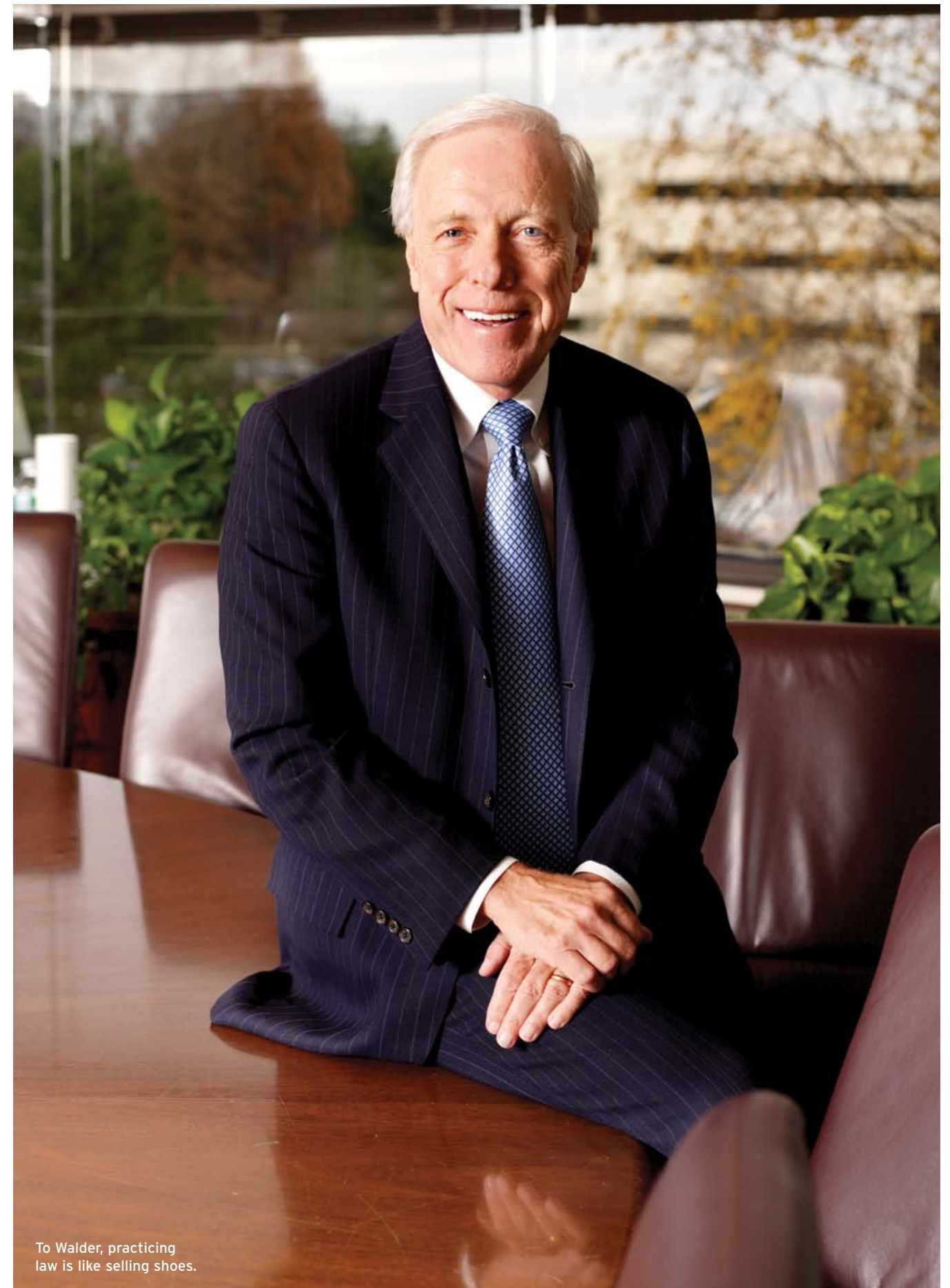
"My father liked to say, 'Self-praise is no recommendation,'" he says.

He'd rather talk about shoes.

He grew up an only child in the decidedly middle-class town of Passaic, N.J., where his parents owned a small shop on Market Street called New York Shoe Store (his father was born in New York). Walder spent a lot of time there as a

JUSTIN WALDER

- ▶ Criminal defense lawyer at Walder, Hayden & Brogan in Roseland.
- ▶ Former Gov. Brendan Byrne was a client.
- ▶ No. 1 point-getter on the *New Jersey Super Lawyers* list in 2009.
- ▶ No. 2 in 2008.
- ▶ Selected to the *Super Lawyers* list from 2005 through 2010.



To Walder, practicing law is like selling shoes.

young man and later, while in high school, also worked at National Shoes.

“Practicing law is a lot like selling shoes,” he says with a wide smile. “If you really wanted to succeed at selling shoes, you had to show the shoes to three or four customers at a time. In law, you’re also multitasking within parameters. “And you have to know how to communicate.”

That’s his real secret. His understanding of people. Ask someone who knows him well.

“He’s the best,” says former New Jersey Gov. Brendan Byrne, who gave Walder his break as a prosecutor. Walder’s reputation today is exactly what he imagined it would be when the two first worked together. “He handled some of the most complicated trials that came through the prosecutor’s office. He takes command of a courtroom when he walks in, and he gives his client his money’s worth, even if he loses the case.”

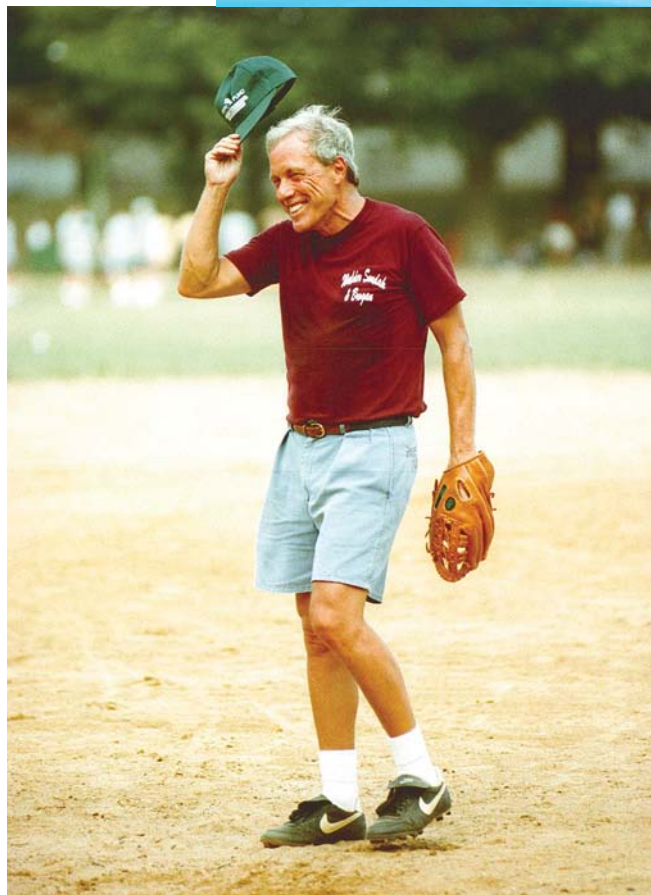
Walder’s human touch is one factor in his success. Prodigious work habits is another. During trial preparations, Walder lives and breathes the case, frequently waking up in the middle of the night to jot down a note or leave voice mails. “I live by the view that there is an opportunity to be creative here, but there is no substitute for preparation. You win cases and you lose cases. I would never want to lose a case because I wasn’t fully prepared,” he says. “Maybe I’m somebody who over-prepares, because I never want to look back and say, ‘If I only did this or spent more time on that.’”

As one of the state’s top criminal defense attorneys, he’s represented all manner of colorful people (public officials, lawyers, businesspeople) through the years. And one Francis X. Vitale Jr.

In 1998, Vitale pleaded guilty to two counts of wire fraud and tax evasion after embezzling \$12.5 million from his New Jersey-based company, Engelhard Corp., to fuel an addiction. Not for drugs or alcohol. For vintage European clocks from the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries.

Walder didn’t dismiss the nature of the strange addiction. He tried to understand it.

“One of the things I learned in talking to people in the field



Walder at play. Top: With sons, and fellow lawyers Jeffrey and Steven in back; grandkids Alex and Jessica in front. Bottom: Taking a bow at a charity softball game.

[of clock collection] is that there is actually some level of addiction, particularly to these antique clocks,” he says. “You have people who are ardent collectors who really become hooked. We even talked to curators at various museums who wrote letters for Vitale pointing out the addictive nature to this type of collecting.”

Vitale got a two-and-a-half-year sentence and to this day Walder refuses to turn his client into a punch line.

“Sometimes you become a bit of a psychologist in this profession, helping your clients through difficult times, not just as a lawyer, but as a human being. We’re all human. We all have the same strengths, the same frailties, all of that,” he says. “And when you’re sensitive in that human kind of way, I think people respond to

you more than if you were just a blunder buster.”

WALDER LIVES IN Short Hills with his wife of 25 years, Lana, and all three of his children are lawyers (although only his son Steve practices—at Walder’s firm, in fact). Life is good. If he ever needs a reminder, he doesn’t have to look far, just across the office at the Super Bowl photo.

“I’ve been blessed,” he says. “Great memories.” ◀