

Community counsel

By Marci Hait

[Complete Business Index](#)

YORK VILLAGE -- James B. Bartlett always knew he wanted to be a lawyer.

At the young age of 12, Bartlett devoured the biography of Clarence Seward Darrow, one of the country's most renowned lawyers and civil libertarians.

Now, nearly two decades into his career, the trial lawyer said he couldn't be happier with his successes and a recent switch back to owning his own practice.

"I really enjoy the work of being a lawyer," he said, sitting in his office overlooking the heart of York Village. "It's as much about making a real connection with people as it is learning about the law ... I get a lot of satisfaction when I can help a client achieve their goals."

Bartlett said he believes much of that fulfillment is linked to his initial career path. The Saugus, Mass., native was an elementary school teacher in Arlington, Mass., for 15 years. Toward the end of his teaching career, he said he met an individual who was attending law school at night and that discussion helped rekindle his passion for legal matters and processes. Four years later, he graduated from Suffolk University Law School on Beacon Hill in Boston.

"I'm always learning," he said. "You have to learn about whatever subject you are dealing with -- that is the challenge -- and I enjoy that ... I also like going to court because it gets me focused. It gets my adrenaline going -- it's almost like being in front of a classroom. When I am there I am trying to educate the judge or the jury about my client's case."

Bartlett moved to York with his wife, Susan Christmas, in 1986, and opened his own practice a year later. He had a partner, Jon Levy, for about two years, but Levy was eventually appointed to the District Court and ultimately left the firm. Levy now sits on the Supreme Court bench.

"I learned an awful lot from Jon during that time," said Bartlett.

From the moment Bartlett arrived in York he became immersed in the community.

In his 19 years in town, he served on the York School District, a group that was, in the late 1980s, dedicated to municipal building projects such as Coastal Ridge Elementary School; ran for and was elected to the Board of Selectmen for six years during the 90s and was subsequently one of the first officials subjected to a recall election after the town charter was adopted; acted as chairman of the Old York Historical Society board of trustees and is still very active with that organization and its current capital campaign; is on the board of directors for the Brain Injury Association of Maine; is a member of the York Rotary Club; has been a mentor in the York schools; and he was also on the executive board for the Casinos

No! campaign.

After nearly 17 years in business for himself, Bartlett decided to try something new. In September of 2004, he signed on to join the team of Bergen & Parkinson, LLC, a Kennebunk-based firm -- which also represents the town of York. Throughout this transition, Bartlett retained his York Street location and the same staff. But in July of this year, a mutual decision determined that it wasn't the right fit, and Bartlett said he longed for his autonomy and the ability to focus on the people of southern Maine. He also missed the opportunity to appear before local boards and committees on behalf of his clients because, as a lawyer for the firm that represents the town, he could no longer take those cases.

"That experience was very beneficial. I enjoyed working with all the lawyers in that firm and I felt as though I contributed a lot," said Bartlett. "The affiliation (with Bergen & Parkinson) was very positive. In the end I found it was better for me professionally to be able to decide how I would set the direction for my practice."

That practice is now -- and has always been -- what Bartlett calls "a general practice, which is mostly a litigation or trial practice that is concentrated on family, zoning and land use law."

Other areas of litigation that Bartlett practices include construction and business disputes, business formation work and basic estate planning.

Under the umbrella of family law, Bartlett helps his clients with divorces, post-divorce modifications and parental rights disputes.

"I feel that I have a great deal of experience, knowledge and ability in that field and that I bring a lot of credibility to the courtroom," he said, adding that he is also excited to get more involved in zoning and land use issues now that he can appear before the local committees again. "That is a fast-growing side of my practice and it was impacted because I could no longer appear before the York boards ... I'm back, and I can now do those things."

Bartlett said he also wants to stress that despite his brief affiliation with another firm, his location, clients and staff have remained the same. He works alongside Administrative Assistant Cindy Farley and Bookkeeper Shiela Hills.

For information about Bartlett, whose new tagline is "Your lawyer in southern Maine," and his practice, visit his office at 226 York St., call him at 363-8100 or visit the Web at www.yorkmainelaw.net.

This page has been printed from the following URL:

<http://www.seacoastonline.com/news/yorkweekly/09202006/business-bartlett20.html>