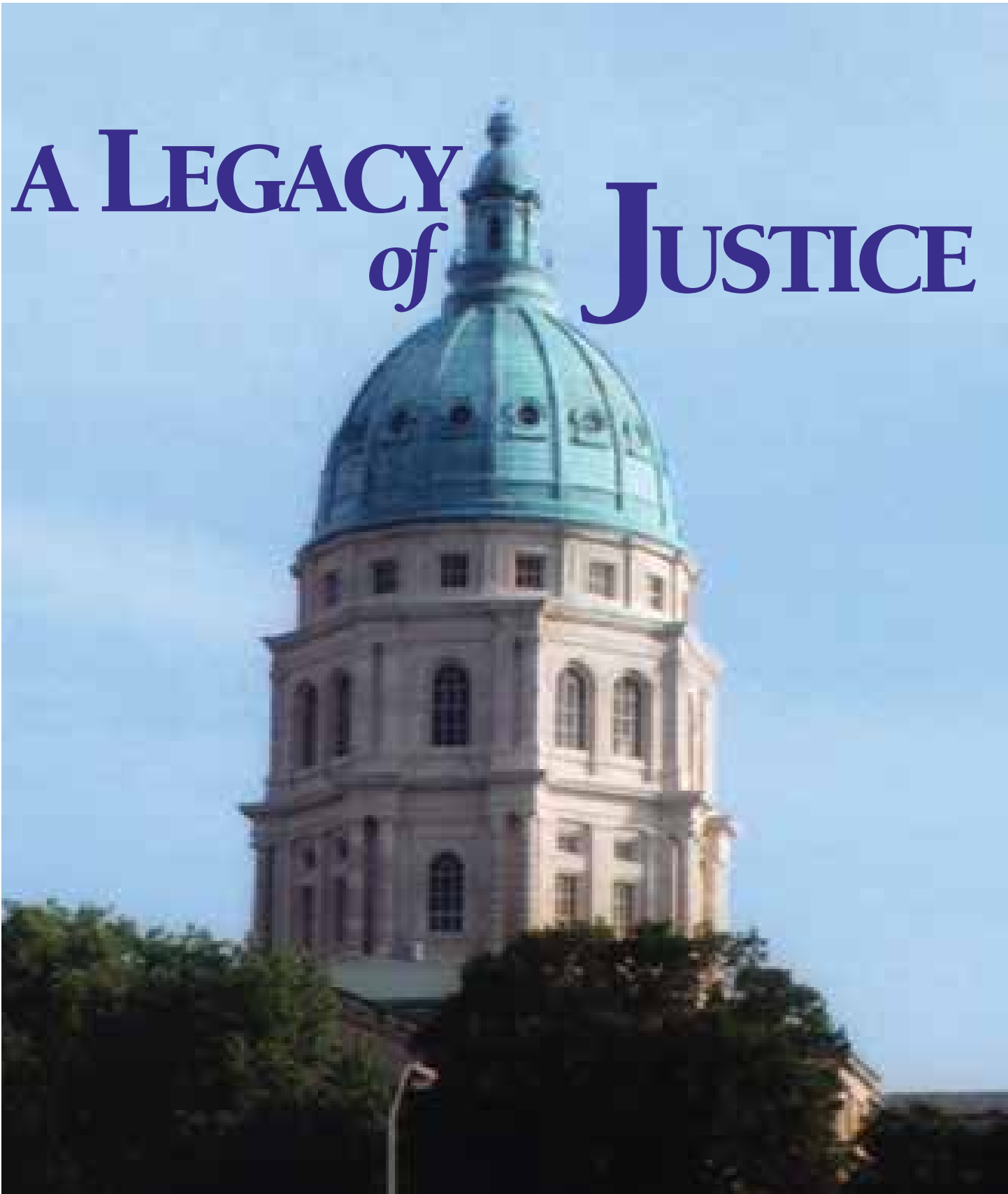


# A LEGACY *of* JUSTICE





KANSAS TRIAL LAWYERS ASSOCIATION FOUNDATION

# A LEGACY *of* JUSTICE



**F**or nearly 50 years, the Kansas Trial Lawyers Association (KTLA) has served the public by maintaining its mission “to improve the legal profession through education, support and guidance by raising the standards of advocacy and trial practice; and secure justice for all by promoting safety, demanding accountability and preserving the right to trial by jury.” Through its ambitious and successful campaign to establish a permanent education center and home for the Association, KTLA is dramatically bringing its mission to the front and center of Kansas life.

Attorneys, particularly trial lawyers, are not best known for their philanthropic endeavors. This is not an observer's opinion. It is the outspoken view of attorneys themselves. As one donor/attorney put it during the campaign, “If a group of lawyers can raise this much money, they must believe it to be a very important cause.”

In the fall of 1997, a KTLA contributor offered to give the organization \$100,000 with two stipulations: one, that KTLA would find another donor to match the gift and, two,

that KTLA would use the money toward the purchase of a permanent home. As you would expect, the challenge was followed by extensive discussion among KTLA board members. This would be customary under any circumstances. But when something as significant as a multi-million dollar capital campaign is brought to the table, and that table is surrounded by trial attorneys, you can expect the discussion to be extensive, deliberate, thorough and exhausting...that is to say, exhaustive.

## **Retaining Counsel**

After 18 months of considering the potential from every angle, the board decided to engage professional fundraising counsel to perform a campaign assessment. In 1999, KTLA selected Hartsook Companies, Inc., a nationwide firm headquartered in Wichita to complete the assessment as well as to provide consultation for the campaign. By the beginning of 2000, KTLA had formed its campaign leadership committee. With direction and guidance from Hartsook Companies' president, Robert Swanson, the committee developed its campaign plan. Chris Keeshan, Legacy of



*Left to right: Dale Weary (Robert K. Weary's widow) and Campaign Chair Ed Hund.*

Justice campaign director said: "We chose a committee chairman that we knew would be dedicated to the project. Ed Hund (Wichita) was willing to take the necessary risks and be bold in his approach with prospective donors. He gave up at least a day and a half a week from his practice. And he did this for two years. That's a lot of expensive volunteer time."

"As a 501(c)6 organization—an association—philanthropy was not necessarily a familiar activity for the 700 members of this organization," Swanson said. "The executive director and the entire campaign leadership committee deserves credit for stepping out of their comfort zone and dedicating themselves to this campaign. I can't say enough about KTLA's campaign leadership committee. Spread across the state of Kansas and coordinated by Chris Keeshan, this committee made gifts and asked for gifts, they had never thought about before."

Hartsook Companies conducted a campaign assessment to test a \$1.2 million goal. Findings from the assessment lead Hartsook to recommend a campaign to raise \$1.7 million plus \$500,000 for an endowment, bringing the total campaign goal to just over \$2.2 million. The primary objective of the campaign was to establish an education and resource center in Topeka, Kansas. The site selected was a 13,000 square-foot, two-story fire station built in 1927.

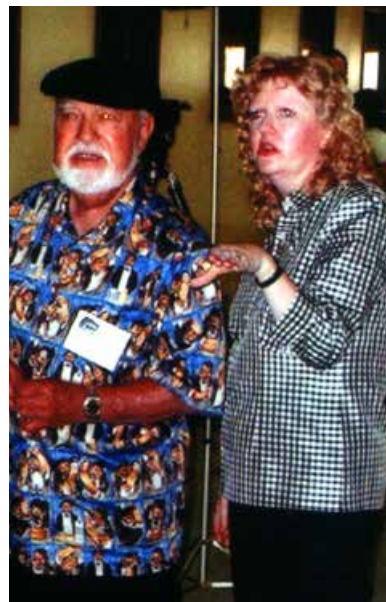
The KTLA Education and Resource Center will allow KTLA to devote more of its resources to the needs of its members and the citizens of Kansas. The Center will be a place for members and the public to learn, conduct business and socialize. The underlying goal is to enhance the understanding of the civil justice system by training and educating plaintiffs' attorneys, law students, and consumers; and by providing prompt and accurate information to the media. The facility will include administrative space for KTLA staff, conference rooms, deposition and meeting rooms and a training/education center.

## Making a Case

"Our board members had never taken on a capital campaign," Keeshan said. "We received good direction and counsel from Robert Swanson and we were aggressive about asking potential donors for gifts. We put a lot of time and effort into getting to know our prospects before we ever met with them. By the time we sat down with someone, we already knew quite a bit about that person—hobbies, lifestyle, hometown, family, values, giving history—everything we possibly could. Without this insight, we would not have been as successful in our ability to present a persuasive case. We needed to make a strong case for support.

"Good preparation also allowed us to be creative. We pitched the project to a member living in North Carolina. The man was known for his great sense of humor so we adapted our presentation to his personality. We sent a video of KTLA members he knew, who gave amusing appeals that hit the mark. He made a gift of \$100,000. The humorous video showed that we not only knew of him, we knew something about him."

Thorough investigation and preparation opened the way for Keeshan to cultivate a relationship with a man who eventually became the campaign's biggest donor. "He was a lawyer, but not a plaintive attorney. The reason he first gave a gift to the campaign was because he was asked. The second \$100,000 he gave because he was impressed by the commitment and risk-taking spirit of our members. He was especially intrigued with the potential of distance education.



*Campaign Director Chris Keeshan, right, talking with Wichita attorney Gerald Michaud who kicked off the campaign with the first gift of \$100,000.*

"We visited at least once every month and through these visits we were able to learn what was important to him. He shared many stories and insights about his family, his philosophies, and his entrepreneurial achievements. He really turned out to be a mentor to me. I knew he was interested in giving a significant gift toward the education center, but we had not worked out the details when, sadly, he died in January 2001.



*Left to right: Nancy and Robert Weary Jr., Dale Weary and Dale Ann Clore standing in the Robert K. Weary Education Center.*

“Fortunately, we had taken the time to get to know his legal assistant beyond a passing hello. She knew he was committed to education. Through my relationship with her I was able to meet with the man's family and begin the process of introducing them to the campaign. My intention had been to ask this donor for \$500,000. After speaking with his wife and daughter on several occasions, they agreed to give \$250,000 if we were able to find a match, which we did.

“This brought the donor and his family's total campaign gift to \$450,000. The education center is now designated as the Robert K. Weary Education Center, in his honor. The Center will contain state-of-the-art training and classroom facilities that enhance and expand the legal education programs for our members and others in the legal community. It will also be the site of future programs like ‘People’s Law School,’ an exciting and effective way to educate the public about the civil justice system and the trial lawyers who protect it.”

## Unanimous Verdict

Cultivation and stewardship were not only important ingredients of this campaign; they proved essential. Although most gifts came from KTLA members, a few of the most prominent – the education center and a Kansas University Law School scholarship – were from non-KTLA members. Overall, there was one gift of \$450,000, one gift of \$200,000, a great number of gifts at the \$100,000 level, and many under \$100,000.

“This campaign illustrated to the members of KTLA that if they were willing to invite new people into the life of the organization and invite current members into the life of the organization in new ways, there would be many new resources they could draw upon,” said Swanson.

An open house for the education center was held in May 2002 with many from the media and local dignitaries in attendance. The building opened in January 2003.

Keeshan said, “The two lessons I’ve learned through this, my first campaign, is that one, you have to teach people how to be risk takers in asking for gifts, especially when you’re meeting someone you don’t know. And two, you need to go in with all the right information. Knowing as much as you can about the prospect allows you to not only be confident in asking for a gift, but it gives you the opportunity to be prepared for each unique situation—down to what you wear, the language you use, formal or casual, etc. It gives you a great advantage. Even a cold call can be warmed up with good research.”

Added Swanson: “The members of the KTLA Leadership Committee dedicated themselves to learning the finer details of philanthropy. From Kansas City to Wichita and from Salina to Pittsburg, they engaged others. Their dedication and attention to research and cultivation produced tremendous results for the organization.”

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*About the author – Denise Rhoades is a free-lance writer living in Newton, Kan. Denise has worked on several projects for Hartsook Companies and regularly writes campaign case statements and articles for Hartsook clients.*

*For more information about Hartsook Companies, Inc., call 316.630.9992 or visit [www.hartsookcompanies.com](http://www.hartsookcompanies.com).*

