



Ken Hartman visits with a colleague in his office at Baird Holm.

– Photo by Michael Tran

## *Kenneth Hartman:*

# ‘Mentoring is Crucial to a Young Lawyer’

By **Julien Fielding**  
The Daily Record

It was a constitutional law course at the University of Nebraska at Kearney that convinced Ken Hartman a legal profession was in his future.

“I had not thought of becoming an attorney,” he said. “Business administration sounded like it offered a lot of different options – it was better than an English or math degree – but I hadn’t found my niche. I always enjoyed politics and government, so I had a talk with the head of the political science department, Peter Longo, at UNK. I took his constitutional law course, and I really started enjoying it. It fostered in me a love of the law, and that led to law school.”

Hartman met his wife, Suzie, a graphic designer, at UNK, and they

moved to Omaha for her career. “I visited Creighton University, and I liked the atmosphere,” he said. “It had a different feel than a public university. As I started studying the law, I saw what a law degree can do. There are so many options. The President is [an attorney], and many business owners and executives are too. It gives you a lot of avenues. But you have to balance law school with the understandings and realities of life, and the cost of it. You don’t really find out what you want to do until after you graduate.”

Hartman had the honor to clerk for two judges before joining Baird Holm. First for the Honorable Kenneth C. Stephan, Nebraska Supreme Court, for one year; then for the Honorable Lyle E. Strom, United States District Court for the District of Nebraska, for two

years. “It was a great experience,” Hartman said.

“Judge Stephan has just retired from the bench, but back when I worked for him he was just a few years into what turned out to be nearly two decades on the bench. He is an amazing person.

“Judge Strom has been on the bench for 30 years and he’s been a part of the Nebraska legal community for over fifty years. He has been very involved at Creighton. I learned from him the value of hard work, how it permeates everything he does, and the importance of having an attention to detail. He would travel around – to New Mexico, North Carolina, and Alabama – to help relieve the congestion of the courts. I traveled with him. He also taught me how important having a  
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## Hartman

sense of humor was to life. It's how you get through stressful periods.

"I was fortunate to have [those law clerkships]. It's the legal profession's version of a residency. I had three years with two very different judges, who were well-respected trial lawyers when they practiced.

"It also helped my research and writing skills. It was a good way to start my legal career, and I was very fortunate to get to work with them."

While clerking, Hartman said that he saw some really good lawyers, and some that could have used a mentor. He also got a good sense of the various firms in Omaha and what opportunities they might offer. Baird Holm impressed him because, he said, it was a firm that took mentoring seriously.

He joined the firm in 2003. "They were hiring in litigation, and as it turned out many of my current colleagues had clerked for judges," he said. "One was Bill Dittrick (who served as law clerk to the Honorable Warren K. Urbom, U.S. District Court for the District of Nebraska). He was my supervising attorney. It was the perfect storm for me."

"Mentoring is crucial to a young lawyer," he said. "When a lawyer is getting prepared for his first hearing, you want to feel comfortable with it."

"The more you have folks help you, the better it is. They not only help you to navigate your life as a lawyer, but also help you to balance life as a husband and father.

"Law school doesn't prepare you for that – the struggles the practice can place on you. Dittrick

and Strom both have large families, so I could reach out to them and get their advice; ask them how they made it through their career. Because they have lived through it, they know how busy you are, and they can give you advice on how to navigate it."

At Baird Holm, Hartman counsels clients in a variety of ways to resolve their commercial, business and/or constitutional disputes. In doing so, he represents clients in litigation in both federal and state courts. He also represents clients in arbitration proceedings and in mediation.

"Lately it seems that clients need advice on how to respond to subpoenas or civil investigative demands they received from government agencies," he said. "We help them in responding to those. There has been an increase in regulation and enforcement of those regulations by the various agencies and offices of the federal government. For instance, the FTC might be investigating a company in Georgia, and they want to get information from other business that did business with the Georgia company. They can send out a civil investigative demand. We would work through what is demanded, and negotiate with the agency's counsel regarding compliance. Depending on the agency involved and the method that the agency chooses to seek the information, the time lines for compliance can be quite different – three weeks to months or even 10 days. There is no cookie cutter approach to that."

Hartman said the best part of his job is assisting clients to resolve their problems.

"I like being an advocate. It's fulfilling. This is a grand profession, and I like being a part of it. I'm

active in the Nebraska Bar and the Omaha Bar, and through them we assist the public by helping to educate the public about our profession and how to get legal services."

Hartman recently became a member of the executive council of the Nebraska State Bar Association, and continues to be a member of its house of delegates as well as its practice and procedure committee, and is a graduate of the Nebraska State Bar Association Leadership Academy. In 2013, he became a member of the executive council for the Omaha Bar Association, and a litigation section member of the American Bar Association.

He was recently named a "Future Star of the Bar."

"I'm also involved with the Robert M. Spire Inn of Court," he said. "It's a great mentoring opportunity. It's a good group. It gives me a chance to learn from these folks and get to know them.

"In my pupillage group we have a diverse group of attorneys: we have a federal public defender; a county court judge and a district court judge; some are in solo practice, two-person shops, and then in firms like Baird Holm."

Life is as hectic at home as it is at work, Hartman said. He and his wife, whom he credits for giving him his purpose – she encouraged him to go to law school – have three boys: Peter, a high school student; Sam, a fifth grader; and Nathan, a third grader.

As far as hobbies are concerned, Hartman said that if you give him good bourbon and a burger, he's "a happy guy."

"I'm also a big Bluejays basketball fan," he added.

"I've been very fortunate and I'm glad to be where I am. I'm just getting started."