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Antonio M. "Tony" Romanucci

Attorney of the Month

Retired Judge Michele Lowrance



Judicial Profile

Antonio M. “Tony” Romanucci

A PRACTICE OF CAUSES

BY LESLEY BOYD



Handi once said, “Be the change you want to see in the world.” Antonio M. “Tony” Romanucci, principal and partner at Romanucci and Blandin, LLC exemplifies this philosophy through his dedication to improving lives whether it is through advocacy in the courtroom or his numerous philanthropic contributions. The son of parents born and raised in Italy, Romanucci credits his parents as inspiration to become an attorney. Because he was unable to get a college degree, Romanucci’s father intended to make sure his children were professionals. From the time he was in grade school, his father encouraged him to become an attorney and the idea became so ingrained in Romanucci’s mind that he set his own goal. “My mother grew up as a young child with bombs exploding around her. They wanted something very different for my brother and me,” explained Romanucci.

“My interest in becoming an attorney never wavered after I made my decision,” he said. “My focus was the only thing that changed.”

Although Romanucci was interviewed by law firms whose work was primarily securities and corporate focused, it wasn’t until one of his parents’ friends, a Cook County judge, urged him to send in an application to the public defender’s office that his professional course changed.

“I spent three years working for the public defender’s office as a criminal defense attorney,” he said. “Getting hands-on experience in the courtroom changed my life. I immediately realized I belonged there and my career would be best spent as a litigator. I also realized I was a man of the people and did not want to represent corporations or defend insurance companies. I represented people who had committed horrific crimes and some who had no basis whatsoever to be imprisoned. I became energized working in that office and that energy has not failed me yet working for Romanucci and Blandin, LLC. I also made some everlasting friendships during that time with attorneys and judges who still mean very much to me personally and professionally.”

Today, Romanucci’s practice focuses on core passions that resonate through every facet of his professional life: traumatic brain injury cases, civil rights violations and protecting children.

Practice Passion and Compassion

His passion for fighting on behalf of injured victims and their families was sparked when his best friend from high school suffered a fatal brain injury playing football. That personal tragedy cemented Romanucci's commitment to fight for the rights of those hurt by accidents, and for people seeking justice.

"At that time, the protocol for someone who sustained a head injury was to wake them by waving smelling salts under their nose, have them count backward from 10 and name a couple of presidents," said Romanucci. "We had no idea that getting one concussion exacerbates the next one and the eight-nine concussions that my friend suffered ultimately were fatal. He spent two weeks on life support before he passed away."

Because of this incident, Romanucci continues to research the intricacies of the brain and how an injury could affect a person's life. This experience in his childhood has resulted in a passion to help those who suffer from brain injuries both in court and through volunteer efforts.

In addition to advocating on behalf of people who have suffered catastrophic brain injuries, Romanucci also dedicates time in his practice to helping and protecting children.

In a case that was rejected by 14 attorneys prior to approaching Romanucci, Jake Tinman's family needed legal help to care for their disabled child. Jake was born with a congenitally defective heart. About 20 days after he was born, he began turning blue, so his parents took him to the hospital emergency room. About eight or nine hours after arriving, the baby was finally able to begin tests to diagnose his condition, but it was too late. By the time the hospital administered the lifesaving procedure Jake needed, his condition had worsened to the point where he subsequently suffered a severe stroke, paralysis and leg amputation, which has left him permanently disabled.

"After meeting with the family and listening to their humbling story, we decided to take the case," Romanucci said. "After eight grueling years of litigation, the case was finally settled in 2008 after a substantial jury verdict on behalf of Jake and his family."

Romanucci is also widely recognized nationwide for his stance on police misconduct and civil rights litigation.

"I have become quite disgusted at how some police officers treat unarmed citizens who have either committed no crimes or have committed non-violent crimes, especially in light of all of the media coverage lately," Romanucci said. "The gross abuse of their position of power takes advantage of constitutional rights that are afforded to free citizens of this country."

In 2007, Romanucci represented a 34-year-old African-American budding rap star from the West side of Chicago named Freddie Wilson. Wilson, an unarmed citizen, was pulled over on the way home from the store for a non-working headlight. In an unwitnessed event, four police officers claimed that Wilson pulled out and aimed a gun at them, which resulted in the officers shooting him 18 times and killing him. Romanucci, through the use of reverse engineering of the event and advanced forensics, proved that a gun found at the scene was planted, that it did not belong to Wilson and that the police testimony was a sham.

"While the police officers' conduct was reviewed, it wasn't a fit punishment for the crime committed in the death of Wilson and others like him," noted Romanucci. "We are out to change policies across the country and are going after the police departments for continuing to allow the officers to get away with what literally amounts to murder."

Romanucci and his team recently fought and won a case in Florida where the deputy sheriff of Marion County shot and killed an

unarmed man. The jury in the case found that the county was guilty of ratification and has, subsequently, instituted a message across the state that shooting unarmed people will not be tolerated; there will be consequences. Romanucci currently has cases pending across the country that address the same issue, police misconduct.

Giving Back

As one of the named partners, Romanucci takes his firm's philosophy to make a difference to heart and sets an example for his employees by donating his time to help many local organizations. His interest in community service began while an undergrad at the University of Wisconsin.

"What began as a one semester commitment helping a recently released schizophrenic patient transition into the community turned into a four year friendship," recalled Romanucci. "Working with him taught me about the importance of helping people who cannot help themselves and translates into my current work with children."

As an experienced practitioner in traumatic brain injuries, most of his volunteer time is dedicated to organizations that assist people suffering from this ailment. He and his firm as a whole, support the Synapse House, a facility where adults with brain injuries come together during the day to seek assistance in recovering from disability. Romanucci not only volunteers at the facility, but also sits on the board. He was also the president of the KNAPP Burn Foundation, an organization dedicated to helping burn victims, for three years. Additionally, Romanucci is the founder of the Children's Endowment Fund, a foundation that he helped establish to assist disabled and disadvantaged children.

"We have helped hundreds of children through the Children's Endowment Fund," Romanucci said. "About two or three years ago, we gave a grant to the Illinois Eye Institute to donate eye exams and glasses to needy children. Through the grant, we indirectly saved the life of a child who would have otherwise not been able to afford to go to an eye doctor. During his exam, a blastoma was found that would have proven fatal if not discovered in time. Stories like this one reinforce the importance of the continued need to support those less fortunate."

To ensure that his firm continues to be a leader in charitable contributions, Romanucci has instituted a policy beginning in 2015 that requires every employee to perform at least 10 hours of pro bono work, which he personally exceeds on an almost monthly basis.

"All of our employees share the same belief that we should give back to the community," Romanucci said. "Because of this belief, our employees will be required to support an organization of their choice with pay."

Reflecting Romanucci's commitment to the community and pro bono causes, he has within the past year received two awards, the Joseph Cardinal Bernardin Humanitarian Award from the Joint Civic Committee of Italian Americans and the Accipiter Award from his high school, Fenwick, demonstrating legal excellence in the field of law.



Speaking Engagements

As a recognized expert in the fields of brain injury, child protection and civil rights litigation, Romanucci is an oft-requested speaker. He especially enjoys speaking about jury selection as being the attorney's best chance of winning a case from the outset. In the five or six engagements he has participated in this year alone, he has covered not only voir dire, but also the disappearance of Malaysia flight 370 as well as the topic of police misconduct. He has also produced three peer reviewed publications this year on the topics of police misconduct and PTSD regarding veterans returning from the Gulf Wars.

Whether he is litigating on behalf of his clients in the courtroom, supporting a cause through one of his philanthropies, or educating fellow attorneys and law students through his many seminars, Romanucci's passion for making a difference in the lives of those unable to help themselves is a common thread weaving throughout his life.



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“Be the change
you want to see in
the world.”

Romanucci
with partner
Stephan D.
Blandin



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AT A GLANCE

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Practice Areas

Catastrophic Personal Injury
Civil Rights

Education

J.D., John Marshall Law School, 1985
B.A., Psychology, University of Wisconsin, 1982

Bar Admissions

Illinois, 1985
Northern District of Illinois, 1985
Pro Hac Vice Admitted States: Florida,
California, Nevada, New York, Wisconsin, Indiana

Professional Memberships

American Association for Justice
Illinois Trial Lawyers Association
Public Justice
Justinian Society of Lawyers

Professional Recognition

AV Rated by Martindale Hubble, 2005-2013
Top 100 Super Lawyer in Illinois
Best Lawyer in Chicago by U.S. News and World Report,
2013-2014
Leading Lawyer of Illinois

Hobbies

Photography
International Travel
Running Marathons
Competitive Racquetball

Family

Elizabeth, 23, Hospitality and Event Planner
John, 21, Sports Management Major, Indiana University