

Founding partner of Delaware firm took his legal leap of faith at age 36

By Brian Cox

Delaware Attorney Thomas Uebler is rarely inclined to say more than necessary.

“Being a good lawyer, I think, requires a lot of listening, so I try to listen more and talk less,” he says.

And when he does choose to speak, he is rarely inclined to engage in over-the-top rhetoric, preferring to maintain a calm, civil, and dispassionate demeanor, even with opposing counsel.

“I’ve always been proud of the fact that I could have a case against a lawyer and be friendly with them afterward,” he says.

A founding partner of McCollom D’Emilio Smith Uebler LLC in Wilmington, Delaware, the corporate litigator grew up around law. Uebler’s father, Al, was a patent attorney with a solo practice and his mother, Marsha, was the firm’s office manager. There was little talk of legal affairs around the dinner table, however.

“By the time they got home I think they had other things they would rather talk about,” says Uebler wryly.

While being a lawyer influenced his son’s decision to become an attorney as well, Al Uebler did more to guide his son into the legal profession by taking him to lunch one day in 1998 with a prominent criminal defense lawyer named Eugene Maurer. Maurer at the time was part of the defense team in the highly publicized murder trial of Tom Capano, a lawyer and former Delaware deputy attorney general who was accused of killing Anne Marie Fahey, a woman he had been having an affair with. Several books were ultimately written about the case.



A passionate golfer, Tom Uebler competes at BMW Championship Pro-Am in Wilmington, Delaware.



Maurer made a lasting impression on 16-year-old Uebler when he arrived at the lunch wearing what Uebler describes as a “Canadian tuxedo”: A denim jacket and jeans.

“It was different from what I imagined a lawyer would look like,” says Uebler. “I thought that was pretty cool.”

Uebler grew up in Newark, Delaware, the youngest of four children. His oldest sister, Julie, also became a lawyer, and though she tried to turn Uebler away from a law career by encouraging him to be a dentist, he ignored her advice. Instead, he headed out west to attend Arizona State University where he earned a degree in justice studies. While an ASU student, he engaged nascent political aspirations by volunteering with the Republican National Committee in its redistricting office and working for Sen. John McCain as a constituent case worker.

The experience left him with “a distaste for partisan politics after seeing a little bit of the sausage being made.”

After graduation, Uebler and his future wife, Cameron, lived in Memphis, where he served as a traveling consultant for his college fraternity, Pi Kappa Alpha, visiting nearly 50 schools in the course of a year. Uebler then returned to Wilmington to get his law degree from Widener University School of Law.

If a criminal defense attorney was one source of inspiration for Uebler going to law school, it took only one internship at the Delaware Department of Justice for Uebler to realize he did not want to practice criminal law.

“It was really interesting and they were great people, but I knew after that summer I wouldn’t be cut out for criminal work,” he says. “I admire the prosecutors and the defense attorneys. When people’s lives are at stake, that’s a different ball game. It takes a special kind of person to do that kind of work.”

Uebler then began to gravitate toward corporate litigation. He became the editor in chief of the Delaware Journal of Corporate Law and spent a summer interning at Richards Layton & Finger, one of the state’s largest and best law firms, which he would join as a corporate litigation associate after graduating as valedictorian from Widener.

“I came with an understanding of what the law was, but I didn’t have any skills to persuade people or judges on what the law should be,” says Uebler. “I learned by watching a lot of good lawyers who all had different personalities and different styles. I didn’t want to try to be any one of them, but tried to pick up bits and pieces and be me – have my own personality.”

He drew on qualities he admired in mentors, such as Justice Randy Holland, whom Uebler clerked for his third year of law school, and Greg Varallo, then a partner at Richards, Layton & Finger. Uebler worked to emulate the quiet and unassuming

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Delaware Supreme Court justice's writing style, which was to the point, clear and simple while still thoughtful. Varallo taught Uebler that an attorney needs three things: Clients, reputation, and skills. Uebler still regularly ensures he has all three boxes checked.

After Richards, Layton & Finger, Uebler joined the litigation law firm of Cooch and Taylor, where he partnered with his law school classmates Matt D'Emilio and Jenny Smith, with whom he would ultimately start their current firm along with Dan McCollom. While at Cooch and Taylor, Uebler expanded his practice to include trust litigation, which gave him the opportunity to work directly with individuals as clients in addition to corporate entities.

"I like having a variety of clients," he says. "I've put together a pretty good mix of clients, which keeps it interesting."

In 2017, at the age of 36, Uebler made the leap to become a founding partner in a new firm.

"We saw what we thought was unnecessary overhead and waste in a lot of firms," says Uebler.

"So, we started thinking maybe we should try our own thing and try to do it better."

The idea was to create a firm with less overhead that could run lean and efficient and could offer top market work at middle market rates.

"It was terrifying," admits Uebler, who had two young children at the time.



During the COVID-19 pandemic, attorney Tom Uebler and his family took up camping. His wife, Cameron, and their two children, Wren and Beck, with their dog Tilly set up the tent at a site near Chesapeake Bay.



Tom Uebler has golfed since around the age of 12 when he started playing with his father. Uebler and his wife, Cameron, enjoy golfing at Fieldstone Golf Club in northern Delaware.

But he remembers being inspired to take a chance by the Tom Petty song "Two Gunslingers," in which Petty sings, "I'm takin' control of my life now."

"I'm not sure what the true meaning of the song is, but to me it meant I had an opportunity to do things my way and on my own terms," says Uebler. "I think the theme is also reflected in the autonomy we try to give all our colleagues."

Now at 12 attorneys and growing, the firm remains concentrated on practice areas surrounding trusts and estates and business and corporate transactional and litigation work.

"We're not trying to do everything," says Uebler. "We have a few focus areas that we want to do very well."

In order to keep its overhead low, the firm outsources its IT, billing, accounting, and human resources, which Uebler says allows the attorneys to focus on their clients.

Uebler says the young firm's culture is still developing, but that it is driven by the idea that if they bring in good people and treat them well, the culture will organically emerge.

"We just try to find people who take their clients and their work very seriously but don't take themselves too seriously and let the culture develop from there," says Uebler.

The firm joined Primerus™ in 2020, at the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. Uebler was working with an attorney from Atlanta, Halsey Knapp, who was a Primerus™ member and suggested the firm consider joining. Uebler and his wife have now attended several Global Conferences.

"It's a great way to meet good people and good lawyers across the country," says Uebler. "It's a great resource for similarly situated firms and lawyers – similar in size, similar in practice areas and markets."

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Uebler and his wife, Cameron, live in Chadds Ford, Pennsylvania, with their two children, Wren, 9, and Beck, 6. They've recently gotten into vegetable gardening and raising chickens. An avid golfer, Uebler also is into cooking and camping. He serves on numerous boards, including Goodwill and the Delaware Museum of Nature and Science.

Uebler's approach to his practice is rooted in a secure understanding of his nature. He strives to be measured, level-headed, objective, and civil. He says people sometimes say they are surprised to learn he is a lawyer and he takes it as a compliment. His grandmother, before she died only a few weeks ago, told him that he had always been comfortable with who he was and had never tried to be someone he wasn't.

"I think it's served me well, not trying to be somebody else," he says.



The Ueblers have recently started vegetable gardening and raising chickens.