

# Charleston attorney relishes variety and the joy of ‘learning something new’

By Brian Cox



If attorney Tim Muller could have his dream job, he often jokes that he'd be a lifeguard again.

"That summer job was the pinnacle," he says with a laugh.

The Rosen Hagood litigator developed his love for the water growing up near the shores of Lake Michigan in Saugatuck, Mich., a charming, vibrant town with a thriving arts scene that is popular with summer tourists and beachgoers.

"It was a bit surreal," says Muller of living in Saugatuck.

"Summers were always fun-filled times, with everyone on boats, renting lake houses, going to the beach, and going out to dinners. What you don't see is all the hard work throughout the year that allows people to afford to have those good times."

Tim's family also spent several years in Florida and California and Muller says, as a result, he always considered himself "somewhat of a nomad growing up." The 20 years he's lived in Charleston, S.C., is the longest stretch he's ever lived anywhere.



**Tim Muller had his dream job as a teenager when he was a lifeguard on the beaches of Saugatuck, Michigan.**

Both of his parents worked in education, and while there were several members of his family who worked for the Federal Bureau of Investigation (his uncle led the Miami field office), there were no family lawyers to imitate.

A law career was a notion as Muller entered college, but it wasn't well defined. He also had an interest in architecture and international business. While at Grand Valley State University where he studied international relations, Muller spent a year abroad, studying language and economics in Buenos Aires and London.

After graduating, Muller accepted a project management position with Herman Miller, a furniture manufacturer in West Michigan with a rich history of design. Muller helped design building layouts, worked with distributors around the country, traveled often, and spent a year in New York.

He loved the work.

"It's a fantastic company to work for," says Muller, whose house remains full of Herman Miller furniture. "They're an innovative company and treat their employees incredibly well."

But after three years at the furniture company, Muller concluded it was time to pursue more professional growth and law school emerged as an option. His older sister had moved to Charleston, and following several visits, Muller enrolled at the Charleston School of Law.

Drawing on his experience in business, Muller says he approached law school transactionally. He served as articles editor and on the editorial board of the Charleston Law Review. During his final year as a law student, he worked for Judge Patrick M. Duffy of the United States District Court of South Carolina.

Muller found the positive attitude and congeniality in Charleston refreshing. When he interviewed for clerkships after law school, he was struck by the culture of civility.

"I think civility still exists here, maybe more than most places in the country, and it's an attribute that makes the area unique and a wonderful place to live," he says.

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**Tim lives in downtown Charleston, S.C., and for several years has chaired the Charleston Peninsula Neighborhood Consortium, a group of 14 neighborhood associations in Charleston that represent 35,000 residents.**

When he first arrived in Charleston and joined the legal community, he says the county bar was still small enough for everyone to know each other. It's grown a lot in the past 15 years, of course, but Muller says an element of collegiality continues to prevail.

"If an attorney refuses to treat people with respect and civility while practicing law here, it's quickly noticed and remembered by other attorneys in South Carolina," he says.

During his 2L year, Muller clerked at Rosen Hagood in its construction law and municipal law practices. He's been with the firm ever since.

"The great thing about the firm is that we've always had a history of working in many different areas, which is great for a new lawyer because you get to learn about each area from other partners in the firm," he says. "You're always learning something new."

Muller is now an equity shareholder, and his practice focuses on construction law and litigation, government and utilities law, condemnation, and business and commercial litigation.

Muller and his wife live in downtown Charleston with their two sons, Benjamin, 11, and Pierce, 6. Their home is in an area where most of the houses were built in the early 1800s, which engages Muller's lifelong interest in architecture.

He chairs the Charleston Peninsula Neighborhood Consortium, a group of 14 neighborhood associations in Charleston that

represent 35,000 residents. The Consortium concerns itself with issues surrounding the communities' historic architecture, quality of life, and zoning.

Muller has also served with other local organizations involved with urban planning and land use.

"Part of the attraction of Charleston is its historic architecture," says Muller, who represents many local governments, contractors, and subcontractors as outside general counsel. "There's always a tension surrounding new construction."

Though he is now a longtime Charleston resident, Muller remains connected to his Saugatuck roots. On his office wall is a photo a friend took of an old pier on Oxbow Lagoon, which is near Lake Michigan in Saugatuck.

Saugatuck and Charleston are bookends in Muller's life.

Years after he moved to Charleston and became a lawyer, his favorite elementary school teacher visited the city. Muller met up with his old fourth-grade teacher and his wife to show them around town. At one event, they ran into Muller's favorite law school professor, Stephen Spitz, who taught property and real estate transactions. Muller introduced the two influential teachers to each other.

"It's always the best having two different worlds meet," he says with a smile.

Now, if he could just figure out a way to cross his law practice with being a lifeguard.



**Tim with his two sons, Benjamin, 11, and Pierce, 6, who are into swimming, track, and basketball.**