

Changing of the guard

New COO & President-elect named by Primerus founder

By Tom Kirvan

When Primerus founder Jack Buchanan formally began his search to find a successor as President and CEO of the global organization, it turned out to be a much more exhaustive and complicated process than anyone could have envisioned.

"In my mind, it was paramount that we find someone who has a breadth of experience in the legal profession and couples that with a passion for doing good in the world," Buchanan indicated. "I wanted someone who is an entrepreneurial lawyer with a keen knowledge of the legal market who also is a proven leader.

"I also wanted someone who embraced our values and had a passion for Primerus, especially the Six Pillars that are at the heart of our organization," Buchanan emphasized.

Of particular importance, the initial years, Buchanan confined his search to candidates outside the sphere of Primerus, so as to avoid poaching any top talent from member firms.

As he interviewed and considered the worthiness of various talented candidates, Buchanan was on the verge of picking a successor when, in the spring of 2020, the world was rocked by the COVID pandemic.

"Obviously, COVID caused so much chaos and uncertainty in the world that we had to put a hold on the search process as we made adjustments to our business model to account for the safety measures that were being enacted to deal with the pandemic," Buchanan indicated.

When he resumed the search several years later, in 2025, Buchanan invited Primerus members to assist in the process, hoping that by casting a wider net he would find the ideal candidate to guide the organization into the future.

The nearly decade-long search process came to a climax this week when Buchanan announced that South Carolina attorney Christian Stegmaier has been named Chief Operating Officer (COO) of Primerus, a role he will begin immediately as he transitions over the next year to become President and Chief Executive Officer (CEO) as well as the Chairman of the Board of the global organization. Stegmaier's assumption of the President, CEO, and Chairman roles will take place on February 1, 2027 upon the retirement of the Primerus founder, who has served as its President and CEO since it was formed in 1992.

"We are very fortunate to have found someone like Christian to lead Primerus in its next chapter," Buchanan said. "He is an



Jack Buchanan
President, Founder, & CEO



Christian Stegmaier
COO, President- & CEO-Elect

outstanding lawyer with an impeccable character who has been actively involved in Primerus for many years and passionately believes in our mission. He has all the skills, foresight, and experience to take Primerus to the next level in the coming years."

Added Buchanan: "February 1, 2027 is a very special date for the changing of the guard. It will be the 35th anniversary of Primerus since its founding and the end of Act I. Christian will then take over and lead the Primerus Society into Act II – the next 35 years."

The 53-year-old Stegmaier, who holds three degrees from the University of South Carolina, currently serves as President and CEO of Collins & Lacy, P.C., a longtime Primerus firm based in the South Carolina capital of Columbia. When he joined Collins & Lacy in 2002, Stegmaier said one of the primary reasons he was attracted to the firm was its membership in Primerus.

"Their involvement in Primerus was one of the major selling points to joining the firm," Stegmaier declared. "One of our founders, Joel Collins, has been a big believer in Primerus since we joined, and he has served as one of my mentors throughout my career. He is a person of supreme capability and competence, but more importantly he is a person of tremendous character. That's what he embodies and that's what Primerus has embodied for me.

"So, when this opportunity arose, it was a pretty easy decision for me to go from practicing law to helping lead one of the best organizations in law," added Stegmaier, who said he had planned to chart a different career path when the chance to lead Primerus appeared on his radar.

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Attorney Christian Stegmaier and his wife, Paige, were all smiles last May when their daughter, Grace, earned degrees in finance and accounting from Clemson University, where she currently is enrolled in a master's program. Also pictured is their daughter, Ella, who is a sophomore at Clemson studying graphic design.

"I've been practicing law for 25 years, and I had thoughts about transitioning into running for a judicial role or maybe a full-time mediation practice when the spark got lit in me by Jack when he talked about his succession plans at the Global Conference last fall," Stegmaier related. "Jack is somebody I trust and know and is somebody who lives the Six Pillars. The opportunity to follow in his footsteps is incredibly exciting to me."

Stegmaier, a member of the prestigious American Board of Trial Advocates (ABOTA), is a nationally recognized leader in retail and hospitality law. His practice spans state and national levels, where he represents top-tier clients in retail, hospitality, live music and entertainment, amusement and specialty attractions, and private clubs. He also is renowned for defending claims related to premises liability, loss prevention, food adulteration, and third-party torts, and is a leading authority in dram shop/alcohol liability litigation in his home state.

"Primerus is very much an expansion of what we're able to do at Collins & Lacy," said Stegmaier, who is a major in the South Carolina State Guard, serving as a Staff Judge Advocate in command of the JAG Detachment. "What we're able to do for a geographic standpoint is enlarge our scope and help the clients we already have existing relationships with and know that they're going to be in good hands with a Primerus lawyer."

Raised and educated in South Carolina's capital city, Stegmaier was active in Boy Scouts as a youth, earning the coveted Eagle Scout badge that is Scouting's highest award. His father saw combat duty as a Marine during the Vietnam War and worked as a contractor when he returned from military service. Stegmaier's mother was a social worker. Both parents instilled in their son the importance of education, hard work, volunteer service, and faith.

Stegmaier and his wife, Paige, an actuary for a large insurer, have two children, Grace and Ella, both of whom are students at Clemson University, their mother's alma mater.

"We are blessed with two fantastic children," Stegmaier said.

After graduating from the University of South Carolina School of Law, Stegmaier accepted a clerkship with Judge Ralph King Anderson Jr. on the State Court of Appeals. The judge, according to Stegmaier, modeled the importance of a strong work ethic, tenacity, thoroughness, and a love of the law.

"I thought I learned something in law school," said Stegmaier, "but I ultimately realized I didn't learn anything compared to what I learned in those two years of my clerkship."

Stegmaier said he has a similar admiration and respect for Buchanan, a Michigan native who founded Primerus in 1992 with a desire to uplift the legal profession in the eyes of the public and to help counter much of the negativity that was aimed at lawyers.

"One of the many things I admire so much about Jack is that he could have taken the easy way," Stegmaier said about Buchanan's career journey. "His CV is just slam-packed full of accomplishments as an attorney, and he could have retired a long time ago. But when we talk about the easy way or the hard way, Jack continues to do things that challenge him and intrigue him. I have a lot of admiration for that, and it serves as a great template for me."

Buchanan, during his prime years of practice, ranked as one of the Midwest's most prominent trial attorneys, successfully trying more than 200 cases while also making his mark as an innovator and entrepreneur in launching the International Society of Primerus Law Firms.

Jack and his wife, Sheila, who has served as Executive Vice President and Meeting Planner for Primerus, can also take pride in serving as role models for two other well-known members of the legal profession – their son, Rob, a past president of the State Bar of Michigan, and their daughter, Jane Beckering, a judge on the U.S. District Court for the Western District of Michigan.

For all the acclaim and legal success that he has enjoyed, Buchanan has been principally focused for the past 34 years on his leadership role with Primerus and his ongoing desire to spread its Six-Pillar message to all corners of the world.

"I'm delighted that Christian has agreed to be the next leader of Primerus, as he is someone with a track record of being committed to the concept of the Six Pillars," Buchanan said, noting that Stegmaier has served on the Primerus Board of Directors for several years and also has chaired the Primerus Defense Institute. "He now will have the opportunity over the next year to wind down his practice while gaining familiarity with the day-to-day operations of Primerus as we work to expand our reach and influence. He is the ideal man for the job."