



(From clockwise, beginning above) Craig Tobin of Tobin & Muñoz, Kent Sinson of Sinson & Sinson and Kathy Gallanis of Bruce Farrel Dorn & Associates discussed their days in either the Cook County state's attorney's office or Cook County public defender's office. Photos by Natalie Battaglia.

Law firm lawyers remember their roots

By Dustin Seibert

These four attorneys know a courtroom and all its intricacies.

Their talents allow their private practices to flourish at a time when the recession has taken a bite out of the entire profession.

Each of them admit without hesitation that they owe their successes to working as lawyers at the Cook County public defender's office or

Cook County state's attorney's office. Though they moved on from their days of working for the county — some an entire generation ago — each fondly recalls where they received their starts.

They reflect on their first jobs and how those experiences turned them into the lawyers they are today.

Craig Tobin

A lifelong athlete, Craig Tobin still works on the lifestyle he maintained when he played baseball for the University of Illinois-Chicago. He considered playing semipro ball, but then discovered that pursuing this avenue "wasn't all that glamorous."

Good thing the native from Chicago's South-

This story is part of a yearlong series about the Cook County public defender's office and Cook County state's attorney's office.

people were wondering if I wanted to be a supervisor or become a judge," she said. "[Linn] thought it would be a good match and it was just kind of time. He decided my fate."

She describes her decision to join the state's attorney's office as partly family-driven: Her father, Dr. Thomas Gallanis, a retired gynecologist, made it clear that personal-injury plaintiff's work wasn't an option for her.

"He told me he didn't put me through law school to sue his friends," she said, laughing. "I think he would have been upset and as a nice Greek girl you always wanna keep your parents happy."

Gallanis enjoys talking about her position with Bruce Farrel Dorn, but admits that "The Office" possessed the unique aspects of practicing law that she came to love.

"The Office' focuses on chain of command, mentoring, camaraderie, using common sense and making tough decisions," she said. "They don't really teach you all of that in civil practice. It's usually all about money."

In addition to her law firm practice, she just finished her term as president of the Women's Bar Association of Illinois and she also teaches "Murder After the Millennium" at Lewis University in Romeoville with fellow former Assistant State's Attorney Kent Sinson.

But with everything else, she makes sure to spend plenty of time with 3-year-old Craig and her husband, corporate attorney Chris Matern.

When asked if she ever considered giving up her career to be a full-time mom, her answer was decisive and without hesitation.

"That's just not me," she said.

Kent Sinson

A stroll through Kent Sinson's office resembles what you might see if you walked through his former state's attorney's office at the Cook County Criminal Courts Building: boxes of files, manila folders and legal books make up the décor.

No one will mistake Sinson & Sinson for a big-dollar, high-rise firm; instead, it's more reflective of his background as a tough-nosed, respected Chicago trial attorney.

The Elmhurst native's first love was sports. He also wanted to attend school out east. He wound up at Hamilton College, a small Division 3 school in upstate New York where he played football and hockey.

Sinson grew up watching his dad Junie represent plaintiffs. As a result, his father served as the catalyst for his enrollment at DePaul University College of Law.

"My father always portrayed law favorably. It was a good impetus for me to know someone who had successfully enjoyed the profession a long time," Sinson said.

The competitive nature that fueled Sinson's athletic ambitions also drove him to the state's attorney's office, but he gave brief consideration to becoming a schoolteacher.

"I wanted a job that was challenging, had a fair amount of responsibility and allowed you to grow over the years," he said. "I also believed in the cause; I thought victims of crimes needed someone to speak for them."

Following a 12-year stint at the state's attorney's office, something he called a "great run," Sinson heard from many private firms looking to hire him.

"A lot of people wanted to hire me to defend criminal cases, because I knew prosecution so well," he said.

He didn't hesitate to admit that the financial limitations of defense work were a massive deterrent to him switching sides. Instead, he joined forces with his dad representing plaintiffs in personal-injury work.

"Criminal defense work is heroic, but it's hard to make a lot of money doing it," he said. "It wasn't like you'd get rich in a year, but more like 20 years down the road."

"There aren't that many people like O.J. [Simpson] who are in a lot of trouble and have a lot of money."

Sinson directly attributes his success in civil law to the rigors he experienced as an assistant state's attorney. He said most attorneys don't take career paths that allow them to navigate civil and criminal law with a degree of deftness.

"Because you're on trial every day as a state's attorney, you get really good at asking good questions of witnesses on stands," he said. "Civil practice is really no different: You need the ability to follow-up with good questions. I don't know how to teach that, but I'm good at it because I've been doing it so long."

Sinson maintains a concentrated interest in the philosophical and moral differences between civil and criminal law, underlining the oftentimes equal importance of both.

"There's not any real difference from some-

one seeking money damages or someone seeking to put someone in jail," he said. "The bottom line is that you're trying to help someone who's been wronged by trusting in the legal system."

Even after being away for 11 years, Sinson still exhibits a protectiveness of the state's attorney's office. He recalled the late 1980s, when the local media began to attack the office's prosecution and conviction practices as unfair and racially biased.

"It's so unfair a criticism and I worked really hard to try to defeat that public perception," he said.

"No one thinks it's more important than me that the state fairly prove its case. [The state] only brings cases when they believe they can prove they know for sure who did it. I like to rep the side I believe reps the truth."

Sinson added that the natural rivalry between public defenders and state's attorneys is often misperceived by the public.

"Secretly, state's attorneys have a lot of respect for the public defender's office. And this idea that people are poorly represented by the PD office is baloney," he said. "There are some really hard-working, dedicated people in the office, especially in the [Homicide] Task Force."

The Sinsons' downtown Chicago firm consists of father, son and one assistant apiece. Though Junie is winding down his career at 81, Sinson said it's been a great experience working with his dad.

"We probably butted heads more than most fathers and sons when I was growing up, so I can't say it was an easy decision to come work with him," he said. "But we've been at it for 12 years and if it wasn't working I wouldn't have stuck around. I needed someone to be fairly patient with me and he gave me the skills I needed."

Dan Radakovich

Born after World War II on the South Side of Chicago, Dan Radakovich's blue-collar parents raised him in racially tense, low-rise project homes.

His family grew up on 98th Street, a steel mill community where his mother still lives.

Because of his background, Radakovich pursued law on the public service side of things, starting his career with the public defender's office.