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Taking Hands-On Investigation to a New Level

By Lynette Carrington

While some businesses brag about going to the ends of the earth for their customers, John Brewer and Dane Wood of The Brewer Law Firm can literally say it. Much more than a traditional boutique law firm, these two attorneys are the people families turn to when tragedy strikes. Brewer and Wood have built a practice serving the largest and most catastrophic accidents.

A Great Start in the Legal World

John Brewer and Dane Wood are a dynamic duo of legal and technical knowledge who met many years ago when they both worked for Brewer's father, attorney Charles M. Brewer who also has practiced in the valley for over 50 years. John Brewer's entry into the legal world was natural. "Going into the practice of law was almost second nature. It was something that was always around our family. All of the kids would be intrigued at the dinner table with certain on-going cases. I was certainly influenced by my father," said John Brewer.

Dane Wood's experience getting into law was entirely different. "While I was in high school, my parents influenced me to explore a law career. After high school, I was married right away and in college



with a son on the way. With the responsibility of a family, and soon a daughter on the way, I started to seriously focus on doing everything I could possibly do to get into law school, even undergoing U.S. Marine Corps officer training in Quantico, Va. to bolster my credentials," said Wood. "Also, I worked as a court runner for seven years while in college and law school. The networking I did as a court runner worked out well because two days after the bar exam, I landed an attorney job with John's dad, Charles Brewer."

Getting the chance to work together previously at Charles Brewer's firm gave Brewer and Wood the foundation to realize their common work ethic and legal goals. "Dane was working there before I got there and while I was in law school," stated Brewer. "We work together really well; in fact, whatever my weaknesses are, those are Dane's strengths, and vice versa."

"Dane and I both worked for my father for approximately 14 years," Brewer explained, "And we decided to branch out on our own. A lot of the reason why we've been successful is as a result of my father and his training and what he's done. We continue to practice in that tradition." Brewer and Wood founded The Brewer Law Firm almost four years ago. The pair now stays focused on

& Dane Wood



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cases involving wrongful death or notable injury. “We try and stay away from ‘red car, blue car’ type of accidents. Most of our cases are solely catastrophic and wrongful death; something of that nature,” stated Brewer.

Helicopter Cases

Because of the magnitude of cases handled in the past, The Brewer Law Firm has a bit of a reputation. Instead of actively seeking cases, the two partners often have clients coming to them. There have been six cases that The Brewer Law Firm has had against the same helicopter manufacturer, Robinson Helicopter Company. “They’re a good company and they’re nice people and they’re trying to fix their problem,” said Brewer. To date, all of their cases with that company have settled, four of which were over a handshake deal with the CEO/President, CFO and general counsel.

“Originally, we had a case from a family in southern Arizona. However, their crash occurred in northern California,” explained Brewer. “While working on that matter, a helicopter crashed in Australia and an individual had filmed the accident with his iPad. The people killed in this accident were working with James Cameron for the filming of his submarine dive down the Mariana trench. As a result of the capture of the accident,

we wound up traveling to Australia. While there, we met with another family who lost their 21-year-old son in another helicopter accident, along with two other people in Cessnock, Australia. We ended up getting retained by all three claimants in that accident. Closely after finishing our Arizona clients’ case, we settled this matter over another handshake deal. Just recently, we finalized our last claim of an accident in Corona, Calif. We have had a total of six people—in three separate accidents—that we have represented against Robinson Helicopter Company.” Currently the firm owns three of those wreckages and has access to a fourth. They will keep those wreckages and are currently shipping them to Phoenix in the event of any future cases.

“We own Cessnock, Durham, Bechler and Glendale wreckages,” said Wood. This access to wreckage enables them to get a first-hand look at what happened and gain an understanding of how things were or were not working. They believe these helicopters will be a great asset in any future cases. The duo does not know of any other attorneys that actually own this type of evidence that they can feature so prominently in current and possibly future cases. The two actually attribute their knack for their thorough investigative work to John Brewer’s father, Charles Brewer.

“Most attorneys will have their expert rely upon an NTSB report, police reports and fire reports and an autopsy report. Those same attorneys will say, ‘This accident was similar because of *that* accident,’ and they’ll have a list of the NTSB reports,” Brewer explained. “We own four wreckages and we’ve inspected seven,” said Wood. “We will go to the scene ourselves and take our experts with us. That’s what we do.”

“We sort of drop everything to do everything. We had four days’ notice to go to Australia,” said Wood. That certainly didn’t stop them, though. They dropped everything in order to be there for their clients. Brewer and Wood are continuing to work constructively with the owners of Robinson Helicopter Company on behalf of their clients and to possibly try to avoid any future accidents. According to the partners, they’ve enjoyed the challenge of handling a case in another country. “We have a choice of venue and rather than a drawback, it’s an advantage,” noted Wood.

“Something we consider to be very important is that we practice law in almost a completely different fashion than most

people. On a separate case, we had only a one-day notice to fly to Australia. Not many attorneys would drop everything on a day's notice and fly to Australia. We don't look at the expense of investigating a case as any type of barrier," Brewer noted.

"We're sort of unconventional and unorthodox in the way we approach things, but it works for us," said Wood. To illustrate the point another way, there was a helicopter convention in Las Vegas. We attended that convention in an effort to gain a better understanding of the upcoming safety measures in the industry, and we didn't indicate that we were from a law firm," said Brewer. That experience ended up serving as a virtual gold mine, offering insight and credibility as to the inner workings of the helicopter industry.

On the Case

Other companies they've had cases against include just about every major car and heavy equipment manufacturer. "We do a lot of construction and heavy machinery cases. We do a lot of dram shop cases and product liability, automobile defects, trucking, gas lines, utility type of accidents and burn injuries," Wood noted.

Specifically, with product liability, The Brewer Law Firm really does their homework to understand how a particular product works. "We had a Honda ATC case while we worked at my father's," said Brewer of a former case. To gain insight as to how faulty gas tanks figured into the equation of their case, they purchased various tanks and studied them. "We owned over 30 Honda ATC tanks. We buy this stuff and it helps us tremendously in those cases after researching how things work."

Brewer also took a case out of northern Arizona involving a massive transformer explosion. "Essentially what happened was that they were doing an overhaul on the transformer. It was at the Cholla power plant. The transformer was the size of two or three football fields, and it exploded," said Brewer. It took three days to put the fire out but the real challenge was unraveling what happened and who was at fault. In addition to The Brewer Law Firm team, there were three experts from Philadelphia working to discover what led to the explosion. "Nobody had any idea what happened. We finally figured it out," said Brewer. It turns out the explosion had to do with the very pure mineral oil that is required for the transformer, and a vacuum was broken and air bubbles and water were introduced into the system. "That was probably the most technically difficult case I've ever worked on and the case went on for two years," Brewer noted. "We originally had to depose a gentleman who designed the transformer for General

Electric, then he became our expert and we finally figured out what really happened."

When it comes to product liability and heavy machinery, the attorneys really know every angle of a case, often before it gets started. Brewer quipped, "Dane knows as much about Caterpillar backhoes as Caterpillar does!" Wood added, "I spend a lot of

time on heavy machinery product liability. I've had a unique set of cases involving backhoe loaders." There are even a number of product changes and retrofits that have been done by Caterpillar as a result of the litigation. "We've had Caterpillar cases all over the United States," said Wood. "There are not too many people in the country practicing in that area, so I know the attorneys on the other side and they know me. We've had the chance to get to know each other." Backhoe cases are definitely Wood's specialty. "Over

the years, there have been 13 cases; these were all very tragic," said Wood. "All but two cases involved death. It is an unfortunate reality that these kinds of cases leave behind widows and children. There is a lot involved in these cases."

Brewer and Wood have also represented a family that suffered three major tragedies. In one case, they represented a widow and infant children of a young man crushed and killed by the swinging boom of a Caterpillar backhoe loader alleged to be defective. This case spawned 12 other similar lawsuits they brought across the country. A few years later, tragedy struck that widow's sister whose young child suffered life-threatening injuries in a freak accident. And, recently, their grandmother was killed in a car crash. "This family has been stricken by tragedy three different times and through those tough times, we've represented them," explained Wood.

"The family thinks of John, me and our staff as family," Wood said. "We still communicate with them on a regular basis concerning milestones in their family. And, tragically, yet another family member recently suffered a medical error that he has asked us to investigate. As for the young child who suffered life-threatening injuries, he receives care at home as there is nothing any doctors can do for him. The parents are very, very dedicated. The young boy's parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles, and cousins all live within the same neighborhood so they all help care for the child. I cannot emphasize enough how amazing and close-knit this family is. They have shared with me that the young child has made huge strides."

In a case that dates back to Charles Brewer's firm, but didn't settle until after Wood and Brewer had left to start their own firm,

“All kinds of things happen, but it makes for great stories”

they represented a young boy who was staying at a Best Western hotel. “A little boy hopped in the Jacuzzi at the hotel, which was set at 142 degrees. He was from Switzerland and just came here for a day on his way to Chicago,” said Brewer. Tragically, the young boy sustained third-degree burns from the waist down which required grafting and harvesting skin for most of his lower torso.

“That case was an uphill battle for all involved. The hotel only had a million dollars of insurance for a hotel with 142 rooms. You figure if there were four people in a room and say there was a fire at the hotel that would be less than \$20,000 per person. In the end, we had to pierce the corporate veil—something we’re very proud of accomplishing,” Brewer said. “It was heavily contested and it comes back to a lot of training, but we had the former CFO and the former CEO of Best Western testifying against them.” Finding former employees and securing testimony for cases has been a highly effective strategy for The Brewer Law Firm in many cases and this case was certainly no exception. The relationship with the family is important and that continues to this day. “Currently, he has healed as much as he ever will. He is home in Switzerland with his family and we are still in communication with them,” Brewer noted.

Yet another case pitted the legal team against the famous energy drink Red Bull. In addition to being famous for their caffeine-fueled libation, they also hold outdoor events across the United States called Flugtag (meaning “air show” in German) where people construct all kinds of wacky devices and then launch them off a ramp and try to fly them as long as possible. “Somebody had gotten really drunk during Flugtag—they pour liquor down at these events,” Wood explained. “He ended up leaving the event, getting on the road and ran over a police officer. At that time, we sued Red Bull.”

During the discovery and investigation process, Wood and Brewer do a lot of the footwork themselves. “A lot of attorneys send out investigators, who send out paralegals, who send out somebody else to talk to people, but we prefer to go out ourselves. Get down and dirty,” stated Brewer. “I’ve had guns stuck in my face and I had a guy urinate on my feet one time. All kinds of things happen, but it makes for great stories and, in our opinion, better representation. This was the type of representation we were taught.”

A Solid Support Team

Of course Brewer and Wood couldn’t do it all on their own and they have a few people within the firm to assist them with key technical and legal tasks. Sean Gnant, a paralegal and technical researcher, assists with many mental and physical tasks associated with the very intense mechanical and logistical issues that are often a part of The Brewer Law Firm’s cases. You might say that Gnant is the MacGyver of the group; painstakingly investigating, taking items apart and doing testing in connection with any number of parts, pieces, equipment or anything else



John B. Brewer

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Dane L. Wood

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Partners John Brewer and Dane Wood

that could assist Brewer and Wood on a case. “You think we think outside the box? Sean *really* thinks outside the box,” said Wood. “He’ll buy manuals, go on eBay, find technical manuals and advertisements and literature, go to junkyards and get things and pull them apart; whatever it takes.” Brewer added, “We’re very hands-on. We pretty much do the same thing. I could show you photos of us in shorts picking up the transmission of a helicopter in Cessnock Australia in an 85 degree swamp with snakes on the ground.”

“We are fortunate to have Kay Rush, a paralegal with over 25 years’ experience, as part of our team. Kay is extremely knowledgeable about all facets of our practice, and we depend on and appreciate her excellent skills and abilities. Kay is a consummate professional and is well known for her outstanding professionalism and work ethic,” said Wood.

Despite the long hours and intense work involved in their cases, Brewer and Wood try to make the workplace a little less formal and a little more fun. “We try to have a relaxed atmosphere here,” Brewer noted. Wood added, “We encourage camaraderie, there’s a lot of joke playing and we pull a lot of pranks. We also have office luncheons.” With so much pressure and people’s lives and well-being at stake, keeping a light-hearted environment helps everyone involved.

Despite the great tragedy that they witness on a daily basis, or perhaps because of it, the two lawyers wake up every day ready to fight the battle again. “We remain passionate about what we do because it is a continual learning experience. Each case is unique. Each client is unique and most importantly, we enjoy assisting people in need,” finished Brewer.

At A Glance

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John B. Brewer

Education:

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- Master of International Management, American Graduate School of International Management “Thunderbird,” 1993
- Bachelor of Science, University of Southern California 1990

Bar Admissions:

- State Bar of Arizona, 1997
- U.S. District Courts, 2006
- U.S. Supreme Court, 2007

Professional Associations:

- Arizona Bar Association
- American Association for Justice
- American Bar Association
- Maricopa County Bar Association
- Attorney’s Information Exchange Group
- Brain Injury Association of Arizona
- Arizona Governor’s State Rehabilitation Council

Dane L. Wood

Education:

- Juris Doctor, Arizona State University, 1994
- Bachelor of Science, Arizona State University, 1991
- United States Marine Corps, Officer Candidate School (O.C.S.), 1989

Bar Admissions:

- State Bar of Arizona, 1994
- U.S. District Court, 1994
- U.S. Supreme Court, 2007

Professional Associations:

- Arizona Trial Lawyers Association
- Maricopa County Bar Association
- American Bar Association
- The Attorney’s Information Exchange Group
- American Association for Justice