4-28-2011

Dean Logan's Blog: Young Alum Goes from Law Clerk to Advocate in RI Supreme Court

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Recommended Citation
Roger Williams University School of Law, "Dean Logan's Blog: Young Alum Goes from Law Clerk to Advocate in RI Supreme Court" (2011). Law School Blogs. 272.
https://docs.rwu.edu/law_pubs_blogs/272

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One of the challenges for junior lawyers at big firms is the chance to have real responsibility for important matters. I can report that one of RI’s leading firms breaks with the mold, as it assigned a case in front of the RI Supreme Court to Adam Ramos (RWU Law 2006). Adam was a star student here, and then he went on to serve as a law clerk for Associate Justice Frank Flaherty of the RI Supreme Court before signing on to Adler Polack & Sheehan. But if it wasn’t enough of a big deal to actually argue the case, Adam faced off against one of the leading lawyers in New England, Bob Flanders, a senior partner at another major firm (Hinckley Allen & Snyder) and a retired Associate Justice of the RI Supreme Court. I have it on good authority that Adam did a terrific job and, win or lose, he displayed the forensic skills that we drill into our students at RWU, and did so at the highest level of practice. Below are some reflections from Adam on his remarkable experience.

“The case was Shelter Harbor Conservation Society v. Rogers. We represent Shelter Harbor and brought a declaratory judgment that property abutting them - owned by the Rogers - had merged into a single lot by virtue of a merger ordinance. The Rogers contended that the property consists of three buildable lots, and the Town of Westerly issued zoning certificates for all three.”

“The Rogers were awarded summary judgment by the Superior Court on the basis that an exception to the merger ordinance exempting substandard lots in a preexisting subdivision. The basis for that conclusion was that a map from 1912 was interpreted to depict the lot as three 10,000 square foot lots. Shelter Harbor contends that the 1912 map depicts the property as 12 lots of 2,500 square feet. The determination of this question was dispositive of whether the exemption applied. The issue on appeal was whether the Superior Court's interpretation was
erroneous and that summary judgment was improper because the interpretation of the map was a disputed question of fact.”

“Preparing and arguing the appeal was one of the best experiences I have had as a practicing attorney. I prepared the brief, but I did not learn until the day before the argument that I would be arguing the appeal. (The colleague planning to argue the case became ill). Any nerves I had dissipated quickly. Chief Justice Suttell welcomed me back for my first visit since my clerkship and Justice Flaherty relayed the story of his first Superior Court argument, which was against Governor Licht. Going up against a legal legend Bob Flanders was less intimidating because he was my Con Law II professor. I was honored that at the outset of his argument, Justice Flanders very kindly remarked that I was “a top notch student” (before trying to beat back my argument!). The bench was fairly hot, with some softball questions and some more difficult ones. The experience both externing and clerking in the Supreme Court definitely made me feel more comfortable. Win or lose, I felt great about how the argument went, both from the perspective of my performance and for the client. I felt like I was walking on a cloud the rest of the day.”