

ATLA farewells civil justice champion

Thomas H Henderson Jr, CEO of the Association of Trial Lawyers of America (ATLA), will be retiring in August after 16 years of dedicated service to promoting the civil justice system both within the United States and worldwide.

Under Tom's direction, ATLA has provided inspiration and support to trial lawyers' groups throughout the world that are committed to upholding the common law rights of the individual.

Tom first came to Australia in 1993 with former ATLA President, Bill Wagner, to meet Peter Cashman, Peter Semler and a few others who were planning an Australian plaintiff lawyers group. From these first meetings, an agreement was hashed out, with ATLA providing some assistance by way of a seed grant and some additional membership benefits for APLA members.

Through the hard work of a few dedicated individuals, APLA was launched in 1994, when Tom returned to Australia for the second national conference at the Hyatt Coolom with then ATLA President, Richard Hailey.

According to a few of those founding members, Tom's unwavering support for their seedling organisation was critical to APLA's success. 'Tom was our biggest supporter at ATLA. It was with his inspiration and guidance that we were able to create such a strong organisation here in Australia', said former APLA President, Peter Cashman.

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Tom's commitment to taking ATLA's message worldwide has resulted in the formation of pro-consumer lawyers groups in Europe, South Africa, Hong Kong, Mexico, Holland, and Nigeria.

Because of his dedication to helping others, Tom helped to create the organisation, Trial Lawyers Care, which provides free legal representation to the victims of the terrorist attacks of September 11 and their families.

While Tom's accomplishments at ATLA are many, they represent only one stage of his illustrious career as a lawyer. After meeting Senator Robert Kennedy during a speakers' forum at the University of Alabama in 1966, he was encouraged by the former attorney general to work at the Justice Department. He took the young senator's advice and headed to Washington, where he embarked on a 16-year career as a federal criminal prosecutor. During that time he prosecuted mafiosi and helped to convict nine people in the infamous labour racketeering case surrounding the murder of Joseph 'Jock' Yablonski.

Prior to working at ATLA, Tom served as the Bar Counsel of the District of Columbia for four years but tired of the 'win-lose aspect of trial work'. He decided that management was the way to go, as he viewed it as a 'win-win situation'. This positive attitude has served him well, and in 2003 he was presented with the American Society of Association Executives highest honour, the Key Award.

During Tom's tenure at ATLA, he



Tom Henderson (left) with Gerard Mullins.

developed what he originally called a 'mom and pop'-style organisation into an international coalition of lawyers, law professors, paralegals and law students. ATLA now has nearly 60,000 members worldwide, a staff of 180 and an operating budget of \$30 million.

Tom refers to his time at ATLA as a 'wonderful adventure' and is looking forward to 'transitioning to another lifestyle', which will include going back to university to brush up on topics of interest like poetry and art; acting as a Distinguished Practitioner-in-Residence at the University of Alabama Law School; travelling with his wife Paulette, who is President and CEO of the Association of Fundraising Professionals; and coaching the basketball team at his daughters' old high school.

We wish Tom the best of luck as he embarks on his next adventure. **PL**