



LAWYERS MAKING A DIFFERENCE A REMARKABLE RETIREMENT

JIM ST. CLAIR, A RETIRED HUNTINGTON LAWYER, HAS DEDICATED MUCH OF HIS LIFE TO GIVING BACK. TODAY HE SPENDS HIS TIME TRAVELING THE WORLD TO ASSIST LAWYERS IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES.

By Katherine Reasons-Pyles

Photography by Rick Lee

For some, retirement is the time for reflection. For others, it's the time for golf. For Jim St. Clair of Huntington, it's the time for service. After 41 years of managing a successful three-person law firm, St. Clair retired in 2002 and embarked on an adventure that would not only change his life but also change the lives of hundreds of attorneys worldwide.

Just months after his official retirement, St. Clair traveled to Bosnia-Herzegovina with the American Bar Association's Rule of Law Initiative, where he spent 11 months providing legal training and assistance to lawyers in that war-torn nation. It was through that experience that St. Clair realized the global need for experienced lawyers who are willing to share their expertise. Following his stint in Bosnia-Herzegovina, St. Clair volunteered for several years with the ABA's CEELI project, an initiative that works toward restructuring legal systems in the emerging democracies of Central Europe and Eurasia. With CEELI, St. Clair traveled to Ukraine, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, spending several weeks in each country delivering seminars, offering training and providing assistance to lawyers interested in expanding their knowledge. Today, at the age of 76, St. Clair continues to share his expertise through the International Senior Lawyers Project (ISLP), which focuses the majority of its work in southern African countries. St. Clair has worked in South Africa, Zambia and Botswana, and he returned home in August 2011 from a three-week stay in Victoria Falls and Harare, Zimbabwe, and East London, South Africa, where he and his ISLP partner, a Canadian lawyer, worked together to train local attorneys in the various aspects of business law.



Retired attorney Jim St. Clair has traveled the world to assist lawyers in developing countries.

"It's rewarding," St. Clair said. "I get to explore a lot of the world I wouldn't otherwise see, and I get to meet a lot of great people. And all we're doing is offering our assistance. We're not involved in the politics; we're just there to improve the business knowledge of the local lawyers."

St. Clair teaches several all-day seminars in each country with the help of a co-teacher assigned by the ISLP; the teaching duo is also assisted at each site by a local senior lawyer, able to explain any differences between the knowledge of St. Clair and his partner and the laws of the particular region. However, because southern African countries still use the old English common law, their legal documents and transactions closely resemble those of the U.S. Even though apartheid ended more than a decade ago, the southern African legal and economic systems are still far from equal; St. Clair says few law schools are equipped to train attorneys in mergers and acquisitions and other



In St. Clair's office at Huntington Realty Corporation, where he continues to serve as president, is a map that shows all of the places he has visited.

"sophisticated business transactions" because, for so long, these transactions and the industries that necessitate them were controlled by the old British-trained Bar.

"They need help badly," St. Clair said. "It's not that they're not bright. They just need an exposure to business law so that they can assist the industries of their country in a better way. These countries are wealthy in diamonds and copper and other minerals, and the business involved in these mineral operations is sophisticated. When people ask what we're accomplishing, I explain that I'm like the man in the Bible who sowed the seeds – some of our seeds land on rocks and some on roads, and I just hope that some land on fertile ground. You never really know what kind of impact you'll have; you just hope some of those seeds grow."

Because the attorneys in these countries speak English and have Internet access, St. Clair does not have a language barrier or technological obstacles to overcome; he simply has to provide his expertise and hope the dozens of lawyers he teaches during each program will be leading programs of their own soon.

"Our ultimate hope is that one day we won't have to come back," St. Clair said. "We hope the locals will upgrade their skills, that they'll not only be able to conduct these transactions on their own but also start to share their expertise with others. Our programs are a great opportunity for these lawyers to get in on the ground floor as their countries evolve."

However, as long as there's a need in these countries for business law training, ISLP and other organizations will continue to require the assistance of experienced

lawyers like St. Clair, and he said the experience is immeasurably rewarding for all who volunteer. But St. Clair is quick to add that even if traveling the world is not a viable option, there are hundreds of other opportunities for lawyers to give back. In fact, in addition to traveling around the world, St. Clair serves as president of Huntington Realty Corporation; was a deacon and Sunday School teacher at his church; has served on several committees of the American Bar Association and The West Virginia State Bar; is a past president of the Tri-River Council of Camp Fire Girls, the Greater Huntington Parks and Recreation District, the Cabell-Wayne Historical Society, the West Virginia Board of Law Examiners and the West Virginia Trial Lawyers Association; and is currently a member of the Executive Council of the West Virginia Bar Association.

"I hope we never develop a culture in this country like I see in other places, where people do not volunteer," he said. "There are so many opportunities for lawyers to use their skills locally; all you have to do is hold up your hand and get involved. There is a need at the ends of the world, but we don't have to go to the ends of the world to help."

And for senior lawyers, who are approaching retirement or already enjoying it, St. Clair's advice is this: "Give back. It keeps your mind sharp and your body moving. It really makes for a good retirement, a new goal and a new horizon in your life." **WVL**

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