

There Is Work, and Paying Clients

Here are some reasons to consider practicing law in a laid-back small town. The cost of living is less, diversity of clients and their legal needs are invigorating, and job and life satisfaction are high. What more could you ask for?

When Willie Sutton, an infamous bank robber of Depression-era America, was asked why he robbed banks, he explained he did it because that was where the money is. Much to the surprise of many folks, I continue to practice law in small-town Columbus 43 years after law school graduation because that is where the money is.

As a long-time practicing attorney in Columbus, a city of 5,000 in south-central Wisconsin, I have found challenges and rewards. Here are some examples of the rewards that have come my way.

Rewards of Small-town Practice

Diversity of Clients. Small-town rural America has the same client base as any larger metropolitan area like Madison, Milwaukee, or the Fox River Valley. An attorney, physician, or accountant is not competing with as many other professionals for the same clients.

Cost of Living. Housing in rural America is much cheaper, sometimes as little as half the cost of a metropolitan area. Fuel, groceries, and other amenities tend to be 5-10% cheaper in Columbus than in Madison. A \$12-\$15 fish fry in Columbus is a \$15-\$20 fish fry in Madison. Look at the bottom line. A full-time 2,000-hour-per-year attorney billing \$200 per hour in rural Wisconsin makes the same as an urban attorney billing \$300 per hour *if* the rural attorney has an overhead of \$150 per hour and the urban attorney has an overhead of \$250 per hour. Each attorney earns \$100,000 per year but the rural practitioner has a higher standard of living. If concerns over significant school debt cast doubt on

your decision to go solo or small firm in a small town, discuss with a mentoring attorney, local financial institution, or municipal government a plan for them fronting startup costs or assisting in debt service in exchange for you giving the community a commitment.

Education. As you consider educating your children, keep in mind that rural schools tend to be much safer and get more education out of each dollar spent. Also, there are numerous parochial and

BY ALAN J. STROHSCHNEIN

I continue to practice law in small-town Columbus 43 years after law school graduation because that is where the money is.



Alan J. Strohschein, Marquette 1980, is a partner in Strohschein & Green, Columbus. He is a member of the State Bar of Wisconsin's Elder Law and Special Needs Section, Solo Small Firm & General Practice Section, Real Property, Probate and Trust Law Section, and Senior Lawyers Division.

astrohschein@sglawoffice.net



Clock Tower In Town Square, Berlin, Wisconsin

charter school opportunities. Students face less competition for playing or performing time. My wife's piano lessons at \$15 per half hour would be \$25 per half hour or more in Madison.

Loyal Client Base. I find that clients tend to remain loyal to you if you remain loyal and honest with them. Clients appreciate being able to call me in the

I have served on commissions, councils, committees, and service organizations while practicing law. Many of my clients have originated with my participation in these activities.

evening and on weekends. They pay for your services with their money and their gratitude.

Job Satisfaction. Would you rather work more and make more money but enjoy your work and life less or work a reasonable amount of time, make enough to support a family, and save for retirement while enjoying your work and life more? A small-town law

practice gives you the opportunity to dabble in charitable, political, athletic, and artistic endeavors for an appreciative community. I have served on commissions, councils, committees, and service organizations while practicing law. Many of my clients have originated with my participation in these activities.

Social Life. With the cost of living less than in a larger city, occasional trips to the "big city" for the finer things in life are available and affordable. There are opportunities for fellowship and romance in a small town. Farm folks make fine companions for long-term relationships. They value a work ethic. Go on blind dates. I did and found a spouse.

Conclusion

In summary, as the pace of life quickened and then abruptly paused in March 2020, professionals discovered they could practice their occupations remotely if they had broadband coverage or a WiFi hotspot. For the reasons I have given, I encourage you to consider practicing law in a laid-back small town outside Wisconsin's major metropolitan areas. **WL**

Protect Yourself From Financial Scams

Financial fraud is a growing problem that affects people of all ages and backgrounds. Fraudsters are constantly devising new and creative scams that can have devastating consequences for their victims.

Listen to our new podcast **How to Avoid Financial Fraud**, featuring host, Kelly Mould, SVP Business Development, JD, CTFA, CWS®, CDFA® and Anisa Dunn, SVP Private Banking Regional Manager, JD, CWS® to learn ways to protect yourself from being scammed.

JohnsonFinancialGroup.com/avoid-financial-fraud



YOUR MONEY
YOUR
MISSION

Listen to our new podcast episode

How to Avoid Financial Fraud

on our website or find it on Apple or Spotify by searching **Your Money. Your Mission.** by Johnson Financial Group.