



Five questions with... JAMES WADSWORTH

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You were named Man of the Year by the Buffalo Renaissance Foundation. How does it feel?

When I look at the list of prior recipients, I'm certainly humbled to be included with them, though I'm not sure it's justified. I'm very honored to be recognized by the Renaissance Foundation. They are a very dedicated group of Buffalonians who do a lot for our community and are very committed. I am very lucky to have been chosen for this honor.

A lot of Western New York attorneys donate time and money to support nonprofit organizations, but you seem to stand out from the crowd. Have you always been civic-minded?

I started off very early in my career interested in supporting the community. I had a very good friend whose father-in-law was very involved in the (Buffalo) Philharmonic early on, and that was one of the earliest organizations I was involved in. I will say that our firm was, and is, extremely supportive. We are a Buffalo firm, and the firm and my partners feel very strongly that we should be involved in the community. I happened to have the interest and the contacts that allowed me to do so, and they have been completely supportive.

You are well-known locally for your role as chairman of the John R. Oishei Foundation. What does the foundation mean to this region?

The Oishei Foundation was established by Mr. Oishei in 1940 as an anonymous foundation and later, in 1998, was renamed to recognize him for his contributions throughout Western New York. It began as a significant source of giving scholarships to children of his employees. Since 1998, the foundation has given away more than \$200 million in Western New York. Our focus is broad — community benefit — but education, health care, the arts and community support are the areas where we have our primary focus. It is also something that we have a staff that works very hard not just to answer a request for funds but to help the grantees focus their needs and help them refine their grants so that it is even more helpful to the community. We also

try to leverage our funds so that local organizations can get grants from other foundations nationally, and I think we have been successful in doing that.

Buffalo gets a tough rap nationally. With your community involvement, you see the other side of the picture — all the good going on in the city and surrounding areas. What do you think the national spotlight misses?

I think the quality of life in Buffalo is excellent. People may complain about the winters, but I would say that our summers are as good as anywhere. I think the cultural life in this community is matchless. From the Albright-Knox (Art Gallery) to the Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra, from the 21 or 22 theaters we have to, of course, Niagara Falls nearby, there is so much to enjoy about the city and our region. And if the region hasn't grown as much as some might have forecasted, I think that's a good thing. You can't spend more than 20 minutes in your car commuting in Buffalo and you can spend 20 minutes to go one block in New York City. We're close to Toronto, we have the lake-shore — there is just so much here. We have a wonderful place to raise children and to live.

In 2014, you will mark your 50th year with Hodgson Russ. At this point in your career, how do you balance your professional practice with philanthropy and give both their due attention?

Well, I'm certainly not putting in the billable hours, if you will, that I did when I was younger. I was managing partner of the firm 10 or so years ago but no longer being in management has helped reduce my workload, of course. With my practice, I was trained by excellent lawyers starting out and I am now lucky to have very bright, young people to help me with the work that I do bring in. I think that makes my life much easier. The Oishei Foundation takes a significant amount of my time — maybe 20 to 25 percent — but with the help I have here, and a slightly reduced workload, my life is very comfortable.

— MATT CHANDLER