

Alumni Spotlight**Michael Rakower**

Michael Rakower left the firm in August 2002. Since that time, he has worked in the Prosecutor's Office at the UN International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda and served a clerkship with the Second Circuit. In 2005, Michael opened a solo practice, where he concentrates on litigation with a social conscience. He was recently named the 2006 "Outstanding Young Lawyer" by the New York Bar Association's Young Lawyers Section. We caught up with Michael to find out about his new practice, to learn about his passion for public service and more...

What major goals have you set forth for yourself in your current role?

I would like to build a firm recognized for its ability to win high-risk cases of global importance.

What has been the hardest transition for you in starting your own practice?

As a solo practitioner, I am responsible for billing, accounting, IT, client development, marketing, etc. It is difficult to carve out enough time in the day to service my clients and handle all of these challenges.

When deciding to leave Latham, what was one of the things you thought you would miss the most?

The security of knowing that I was on a well-tread path to success.

What one "pearl of wisdom" would you like to tell new associates in starting out in their careers?

Every area of the law is fascinating to someone. Find the area of law that is fascinating to you. Don't worry about the rest.

What is the one thing your law school professors should have told you before sending you out into the world?

Real-world decisions are fast and imperfect.

What is your favorite restaurant?

Django, 46th and Lexington. The French-Mediterranean menu is sophisticated and eclectic. The ambience is both comfortable for the corporate crowd and very stylish.

What unknown fact don't your fellow alumni know about you that you would like them to know?

I would like to sail around the world with my wife and children (when we have them) someday.

What do you enjoy doing with your free time?

I started racing in triathlons a few years ago. I completed an ironman-distance race in 2004. I hope someday to compete at the championships in Hawaii.

If you could live anywhere in the world, where would it be and why?

New York, New York. I am living my dream right now. I own and operate a law office in midtown Manhattan and I am building my reputation as a premier litigator with a social conscience.

What is one major life lesson you learned that you would like to share with other people?

The law is a collaborative effort. But sometimes in life you need to go forward without seeking advice. My decision to open a solo law practice was not an easy one for me to make. When I approached people for advice on the subject, they tended to try to dissuade me from pursuing my plan. They saw the same risks that I saw, but they did not perceive the same rewards. When I recognized I was asking for guidance based on purely subjective criteria, I knew that I needed to make the decision on my own.

What books have you read recently?

Profiles in Courage by John F. Kennedy; The World as I See It by Albert Einstein.

How did you get involved with the Kigali Library project?

I have been on the board of the American Friends of the Kigali Public Library (AFKPL) since Spring 2003. I joined the organization soon after I returned to the United States after serving briefly in the Prosecutor's Office of the United Nations International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda. The lessons I learned at the Tribunal had a profound impact on me. I decided to devote some of my time toward causing positive change in Rwanda. The AFKPL seeks to build Rwanda's first public library. When finished, it could have an enormous impact on Rwandan society.

What kind of law do you practice?

I'm a litigator. My practice focuses on federal litigation and commercial disputes. As a solo attorney, I have the flexibility to work on any matter that interests me. I have worked on a variety of cases since I opened my office, including matters relating to RICO, antitrust, police misconduct, white-collar defense, employment law, and contract disputes. Since I am also of counsel to two well-established firms, the Law Offices of Gordon Mehler and Constantine Cannon, P.C., I have the ability to take on matters that are quite large in scope.

How do your hours compare to the hours you worked at Latham?

They are worse now.

Aside from the award given to you by the New York State Bar Association, what other achievements can you point to this year?

I was published this year. When I was in law school, I wrote an essay examining the Khmer Rouge, a fanatical regime that killed an estimated two million Cambodians in the late 1970s. I wrote the piece for a class entitled "Rule of Law: Controlling Government." My former professor, John Norton Moore, was kind enough to include the paper in a book he published in January 2006 called *To Oppose Any Foe: The Legacy of U.S. Intervention in Vietnam*.

On a few occasions recently, I have enjoyed the honor of speaking publicly on matters relating to genocide and the role of international criminal tribunals. Sali, my wife, and I will be speaking on this topic at Albany Law School in early April.

Can you name a couple of famous thinkers who have inspired you?

As I have developed my practice, I have been guided by quotes from Aristotle and Thomas Jefferson. Aristotle said, "We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then, is not an act, but a habit." Thomas Jefferson wrote, "Never fear the want of business. A man who qualifies himself well for his calling, never fails of employment."