

David Katz:
Focused On What's Best For Others

Life's journey for David Katz (05) has taken a number of interesting turns. And through it all, Katz has focused his concerns on what's best for others – whether he is giving of his time and finances, exploring innovative legal practices, devoting important attention to his family or providing major sponsorship to a non-profit that works to find a cure for a disease that personally hits home.

When Katz was growing up in New Jersey he recalls “there were two things I wanted to do. One was to be a restaurant owner and the other was to be a lawyer.” Katz first pursued a restaurant career through on-the-job training and formal education, earning degrees in Culinary Arts and Food Service Management from Johnson and Wales University in Rhode Island. After becoming weary of winters in the northeast, he and his wife moved to Gainesville when she was accepted into the University of Florida Law School. While she studied law, Katz owned and operated first one restaurant in Gainesville and then a second in Altamonte Springs. But when Katz's wife graduated, their decision to start a family made him realize that a career change was in order since the long, late hours and insecurity of the restaurant business weren't necessarily conducive to a quality family life. “Soon after I made that decision, it was announced that Barry Law School was opening in Orlando,” he says. “I took that to be fate and applied.”



As a Barry Law student, Katz's lifelong pattern of sharing his time and energy also played out in his student experience. “I was involved with most organizations, many in leadership roles and in helping to form the organizations,” he says. Katz was the first Chief Justice of the Moot Court program, the treasurer of the Hispanic Bar Association, editor-in-chief of the student newspaper, Lead Article Editor on the Barry Law Review and a member of the executive board of the Student Bar Association – including the committee that wrote its

constitution. Additionally, along with other students, Katz participated in a memorable moment in the Law School's history ... the effort to obtain accreditation by the American Bar Association for the new law school. “I graduated with my J.D. and just missed accreditation by 21 days,” Katz says. After Barry received ABA accreditation, he later returned to re-take the required credit hours in order to earn his J.D. in 2005 from the accredited Law School.

“The family atmosphere as a pioneer student made Barry a great place to attend law school,” Katz says. “To this day, many of my best friends are fellow students from that class.” In addition to that positive environment, Katz also gives Barry great credit in preparing him for a legal career. “The education I received at Barry Law School taught me everything I needed to pass the bar exam and have a successful career in law.”

Katz then began his legal career in the State Attorney's office for Seminole County where he was offered the position of lead DUI prosecutor and County Intoxilyzer specialist. “It was very valuable to gain experience and training directly from the manufacturer of the only breath test instrument approved for use in Florida,” Katz recalls.

Katz's experience in DUI prosecution proved useful when he went into private practice, forming what is now Katz & Phillips, P.A. in Orlando. "Due to my background, people began sending me DUI cases," he says. "I quickly decided to focus my practice on DUI defense and have done so for the last 10 years." Katz has even written or co-authored nine books, including manuals used to train other attorneys to defend DUIs and DUI-related criminal cases.

Another successful endeavor of Katz & Phillips has been related to a firearm owner's protection program under the auspices of the Texas-based U.S. Law Shield organization. "For a small monthly fee, members are covered if they are ever compelled to use force when defending themselves, their property or someone else," Katz says. As the exclusive Florida attorneys for U.S. Law Shield, Katz & Phillips provides legal services to 20,000-plus members in Florida. Also, the firm just opened offices in North Carolina and will be opening offices in South Carolina, Maryland, Missouri, New Mexico, Louisiana, Tennessee and Kentucky in the first half of this year to serve members of U.S. Law Shield in those states. "We expect to continue building our business with a greater focus on firearms legal issues, as U.S. Shield membership continues to grow," Katz says.



As the managing partner, Katz has guided Katz & Phillips, P.A. from a single office with two attorneys to a law firm of six statewide offices with nine attorneys and support staff. And through the prism of that experience, Katz has some advice for Barry Law students and alumni.

He urges them to remember that their most important possession is their reputation. "It takes years to build and maintain a great reputation, but it could take just seconds to destroy it," Katz says.

Additionally, he has some advice for Barry Law's newest graduates. "When a client pays you, no matter how much or how little you charge, your entire concern should be what is best for that client, not just the fastest way to get this case resolved so you can move on to the next fee."

Katz's focus on doing what's best for others also carries over into his personal life and his time with his wife, three sons and daughter. And it's perhaps best exemplified by Katz's involvement and support of a growing Central Florida non-profit organization.

"My wife and daughter are insulin-dependent Type 1 diabetics," Katz explains. "When one of our twin sons was in middle school he was on the tech crew for a show called Dancing For Diabetes" – an annual showcase put on by a local non-profit that helps raise money for diabetes awareness, education and research. "Without knowing much about it, my wife and I attended the show and were really impressed, realizing the money raised was for such a great cause," he recalls. "But the performance wasn't sold out and there were a lot of empty seats. After the show, I approached the founder and organizer of the event and told her I would like to get involved and help her fill the auditorium."



From that conversation, Katz sprang into action. Over the next 12 months, every member of the Katz & Phillips firm donated time toward Dancing For Diabetes. "With our help, the event went from raising about \$5,000 annually to raising almost \$25,000 the first year we were involved," Katz says. "The next year we sold out and have since moved to a larger venue, and are now selling out the performance every year. In the last two years, we have helped raise over \$125,000 through this organization to help find a cure for diabetes."

Katz, his wife, and his law partner, James Phillips, also joined the non-profit's Board of Directors. "Katz & Phillips has been and continues to be the presenting sponsor for the annual showcase," Katz says. "We are very proud of our association with Dancing For Diabetes and all we have accomplished together."

And when asked what accomplishment he is most proud of in his life, Katz replies simply "I'm most proud of my marriage of 25 years and our children." Recently, Katz and his wife celebrated their silver wedding anniversary with a vow renewal cruise, taking along all four children and a number of friends.

Just one more adventure in a life's journey full of varying experiences focused on doing what's best for others.