

PAYING IT FORWARD

LENNY SACHS ON REINVESTING IN THE COMMUNITY BY JESSICA TAM

When Lenny Sachs' seventh-grade science teacher at St. Gilbert School signed his yearbook, this is what he wrote: "Call me from Stateville."

"The man was a visionary, obviously," jokes Sachs, who heads Howard & Howard Attorneys' Peoria office and manages the firm's labor and employment group. Then he turns serious. "I had sort of a troubled childhood," Sachs says. "A rebellious kid from a challenging broken home.

"I was able to thrive with the help of many, many generous people. ... [Without the] generosity and mentoring that I received from a host of different sources in my formative years, who knows? I'd be working in a factory, dead or in prison. I certainly wouldn't be enjoying the opportunities that I have as an owner of Howard & Howard and chairing the community reinvestment fund."

Expelled for having the highest truancy rate in his class, Sachs never earned a high school diploma. But there was a loophole. "There was a law in Illinois at the time that said if you were 16 years old and no longer affiliated with a secondary school, the Illinois Community College system had to accept you," he says. So he enrolled at the College of Lake County. "For a kid that didn't want to be told what to do, and was rebelling against all manner of authority, it was the perfect place. You don't show up to class? They're not there to babysit. You don't want to want to write a paper? That's one less bad piece of prose that the professor has to endure. It was just the perfect environment for me."

At Howard & Howard, Sachs' responsibilities go beyond representing and advising businesses. From his office just off the shore of Peoria Lake, Sachs rallies staff and attorneys from all branches of the firm to donate to charitable causes through the Howard & Howard Community Reinvestment Fund. Since the fund's establishment in 1986, the firm has donated more than \$3 million to nonprofit organizations.

Sachs has worked with The Boys & Girls Clubs of Greater Peoria, for one, on various projects, such as bringing in motivational speakers like YouTube star Judson Laipply. But in 2011, Lesley Matuszak, CEO for the local Boys & Girls Clubs, had a more basic request. "She said, 'We need snacks. We need healthy food. There was a three-day weekend, and I was in Tuesday morning and all these kids were just tired,'" says Sachs. Matuszak learned that some children said they had not eaten since attending Boys & Girls Club activities the previous Friday. So in 2012 and 2013, Sachs says, "We gave money so that the Boys & Girls Club could buy carrots and celery sticks and healthy snacks for children in the underserved Peoria market."

Sachs encourages attorneys at his firm to pledge one percent of their after-tax compensation for the year, and everyone at the firm votes on which organizations the firm will help. In 2012, Howard & Howard contributed money to eight charities in Las Vegas; one in Ann Arbor, Mich.; 18 in Chicago; 33 charities in the Royal Oaks-Detroit metro area; and 13 in Peoria,



including the Lyric Opera of Chicago, the Springboard Foundation and the Heart of Illinois United Way, where Sachs sits on the board of directors.

And that was before the firm's big fall 2012 giving campaign.

The Howard & Howard G.I.V.E. grant gives \$2,000 to Peoria's Big Brothers Big Sisters program to sponsor matching two children with adult mentors. The Howard & Howard Fine Arts Award is given to the Peoria Symphony Guild so that students in fourth through 12th grades can experience a live performance created specifically for them. The Howard & Howard Future Laureates Arts Scholarship is given to the Contemporary Arts Center of Peoria for underserved students to attend art classes taught by artist Preston Jackson, professor emeritus of sculpture at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago.

To Sachs, serving on the charity fund is one of the best parts of his job. "I wear a lot of different hats at this firm," he notes, "but chairing this committee is really the most satisfying aspect of the business." [S](#)