

Remembrance: Dennis Irl Belcher, 1951-2017

BY JAMES H. WALSH

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Dennis Belcher and I met 41 years ago. I was a second-year associate at McGuireWoods, and he was a new graduate of the University of Richmond Law School. We hit it off immediately. Over the ensuing years, we played countless rounds of golf. Our families shared far too many meals to count and traveled widely together. Were there a flaw in this man, I would have seen it. There were none.



Dennis, who died April 27 at age 65, was an extraordinary lawyer and person. He was tireless. Whether caring for his aging mother, advising his stepbrother Joe on the operation of the family trucking business, counseling America's top executives or simply helping the many who relied on him, Dennis was there: available, reassuring, seemingly always with the right answer.

But it was his extraordinary ability to connect with everyone that made him so special. Asked what he did for a living, Dennis would joke, "I represent rich people." And that was true. But he did so much more. He could sit down with the wealthiest people in the world, or with the guy who showed up for a home repair with equal ease. Bonds formed because Dennis loved people. He loved life. He was empathetic and upbeat. He was a problem solver. Despite his compelling accomplishments, it never was about him. He was interested in you and people sensed that. He was genuine. Even that understates the essence of this good man.

Few attain what Dennis did professionally, but his life was his family, not his job. He married his high-school sweetheart, Vickie, and they remained committed partners for the rest of his life. He idolized his children — Matt, Sarah and Ben — and he lived long enough to know and enjoy his first grandchild, Connor.

Through it all, Dennis remained a small-town boy, and it's only fitting that he realized his lifelong dream of building a house on the highest point of the family farm where he grew up near Harrisonburg, Virginia, overlooking the Shenandoah Valley he so dearly loved. It was a special place, and it brought Dennis great peace.

That's the way many people feel when they visit one of Richmond's treasures, Lewis Ginter Botanical Garden. Dennis played a significant role in its founding.

It's one of the many legacies he leaves, a giant in his profession and community. But I will remember him as my friend, the kind you acquire only once in a lifetime, and then only if you are very fortunate. There is comfort in contemplating how privileged I was to have participated in his life.

Jim Walsh is a partner in the Richmond office of McGuireWoods LLP. Terry Bagley, also a partner in the firm, contributed.

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