

## PROFILE: Jim DeJong



## Jim DeJong: A Life Well Founded

- Marquette law degree: 1978
- Professional status: President, O’Neil, Cannon, Hollman, DeJong & Laing
- Family: Married, two grown children

“I grew up a P.K.,” Jim DeJong says. A preacher’s kid. Son of the pastor of Presbyterian churches in Portage and then Fond du Lac, Wisconsin, in the 1950s and 1960s.

Certain values tend to become ingrained in you with that background: Family and church, for sure. A general sense of doing things that will last, that are solid and good. A deliberate, careful approach to the path of your life, both professionally and personally: DeJong (pronounced “dee-young”) calls this following “the law of the harvest—don’t decide to plant a seed on Friday and expect to harvest on Monday.”

You can see that philosophy at work in DeJong’s career. He left Fond du Lac to go to Carroll College in Waukesha, graduating in 1973. He returned to Fond du Lac to work for a bank, and, after a couple years, enrolled at Marquette Law School, intending to return to Fond du Lac.

In 1976, in his second year of law school, he got a position as a clerk at a small Milwaukee law firm specializing in serving businesses. After graduating in 1978, he stayed on at the firm. Thirty-five years later, he is president of what is known as O’Neil, Cannon, Hollman, DeJong & Laing, a firm with 36 attorneys. It’s been a lot of fun, he says, partly because of the firm’s insistence on observing a “no-jerks” policy in hiring.

The firm’s “sweet spot,” as DeJong puts it, is working with closely held companies of all sizes. DeJong’s own practice has focused on would-be buyers and sellers of businesses. Even if that means,

by definition, that he is involved in situations in which people are going through big changes, his approach is to help them do it in a way that is steady and carefully grounded. His advice for those selling a business starts with having your house in order and having a realistic handle on the value of the business. The fewer surprises there are, the better.

His personal life is also marked by steady commitment to good principles and goals. His wife, Patty, is also originally from Fond du Lac. They are strongly involved in their church, Crossroads Presbyterian in Mequon, where Jim was elected an elder 10 years ago. They have lived in Mequon for many years, and it was there that they raised their children—twins, who are now in their mid-20s. Their daughter got married at Crossroads; their son plans to be married there.

As volunteers, Jim and Patty have been involved in civic arts efforts, including the Lakefront Festival of the Arts, Friends of Art, and the United Performing Arts Fund. Jim is a trustee of his alma mater, now known as Carroll University.

At 61, DeJong is not looking to retire, but he says he might change his work style a bit. A priority now: Making sure he and his partners have built something that will last. “We couldn’t be happier with where the firm is positioned,” he says, and from the way he speaks of his work, his family, and his life in general, there is no doubt that he would say the same for all of it. ■