Feb. 2012 E-newsletter Alumni Spotlight: James Rayis (J.D.'82)

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Alumni Spotlight: James Rayis (J.D.’82)

Name: James Rayis  
Title: Of Counsel  
Employer: Giarmarco, Mullins & Horton, P.C.  
Location: Troy, Michigan  
Number of years at this position: one  
Georgia Law graduation year: 1982  
Other degree(s)/institution(s)/year(s): Economics/Michigan State University/1979

1. Why did you choose to attend the University of Georgia School of Law?
   
   I was looking for an affordable law school with the best international program. With Dean Rusk as a professor I was sold, and it helped that it was 700 miles away.

2. Who was your favorite Georgia Law professor? Why?
   
   While I admired professor Rusk beyond measure, I felt professors John O’Bryne (tax) and Louis Sohn (international) provided me with the most ammunition to learn how to think and work as a lawyer. Outside of class, professor Gabriel Wilner was the best sounding board ever. God rest their souls and bless each of them.

3. What is your most memorable experience from your time at Georgia Law?
   
   Learning how remarkable the intellectual ability and character of my classmates were. My law class was full of intelligent, thoughtful and graceful young men and women. The good friends I made changed my nature for the better. Straight from Detroit city, I was sorely in need of lessons in graciousness and decorum (still working at it).

4. What was your favorite thing about living in Athens?
   
   Athens had enough southern flavor to educate me on what culture was like in the deep South. Also, the new wave sound was booming with R.E.M., Pylon and other great bands playing every weekend.

5. What advice would you give to current Georgia Law students?
   
   The only way to ensure your work in the area of law you most like is to start in that area from the beginning and never waver.

6. What led you to take the position as director of Global Justice Project Iraq?
   
   I had been traveling to Iraq throughout the war advocating for help because of the worsening condition and situation of the Assyrian/Chaldean Christian minority. I was contacted in Detroit by a representative of the Univ. of Utah College of Law that was embarking on a State Department program to support Iraqi judicial and bar association independence. I was asked to be the first director and received a promise from the law firm I was working for to allow the leave and return when I was done.

7. What were some of your responsibilities in this role?
   
   My program was a one year contract to set up, organize and hire local staff for the program as well as to meet with and advocate with political officials for the judiciary's independent role as contemplated in the Iraqi constitution. I also drafted provisions of law and constitutional reforms regarding the judiciary for review by the Iraqi parliament.

8. What did you enjoy the most about your position at GJPI? What was one of the greatest challenges you faced?
   
   Meeting the highly educated, intelligent people of Iraq who had survived traumatic civil war, years of fratricide and family splits yet maintained a spirit of fight for survival of the country and for popular government, which Iraq had never in its history enjoyed. The greatest challenge was to be diplomatic in the face of officials who had no interest in furthering goals of securing basic freedoms in the best interests of the country or its people, including judicial independence or freedom of practice for lawyers.

9. What are your current responsibilities at Giarmarco, Mullins & Horton?
   
   I am of counsel to an excellent firm in the Detroit area that can now offer the experience I provide in international business, trade law and
government contract and procurement law. I basically run my own shop with help from the administrative staff.

10. What do you enjoy most about your job? What is the most rewarding aspect?
> Working with business executives to structure a complicated deal is the most rewarding part of my job. Over the last several years this kind of work has stagnated due to the difficulty businesses of all sizes have had in financing large deals and transactions. It is slowly returning.

11. What is one of the greatest challenges facing your field right now?
> Financing of business deals and transactions has been an obstacle to business development and growth. Fortunately as this is beginning to loosen, both corporate transactions and trade work are building back up.

12. What do you do to handle the stress of your work? How do you relax after a stressful day?
> I run; much slower than I used to, but I run. I follow college sports and note that my two favorite teams played each other in the Outback Bowl. I enjoy the cultural life in Detroit with great music of all kinds, arts groups and a beautiful riverfront.

13. What advice would you give to someone wanting to work in your field?
> If you can start in government, it will be a nice leg up. The State Department, Commerce, DOJ, SEC and others have great training programs in international areas for lawyers, not to mention international organizations of all kinds. If your rank in class does not get you into the job you want, find the areas of entry that can get you in through other ways than the intern programs.

14. What do you enjoy doing in your free time? What are your hobbies?
> I run, drink good wine (I can afford better bottles now), and have the chance to be with family that I missed. When I travel for work I do my best to take the time to really see where I am. I like reading and am not choosy with my books. Right now there is a biography on the poet Robert Lowell, one about current advances in astrophysics beyond Einstein’s principles, as well as one on how the Spartans and Athenians fought the Peloponnesian Wars.

15. What would you consider your greatest accomplishment in life?
> Working in 2004 with two members of the Iraqi Governing Council and international advisors to ensure an understandable set of individual rights, including freedom of religion, was written into the Iraq’s Transitional Administrative Law, the first new democratic constitution.

16. When you look out your office window, what do you see?
> I see structures. Not the building rooftops, trees and Detroit skyline in the distance most would see, but rather I look out my window and see the structures of the deal I am working on. I see various arrangements, contractual operations and also problems and conflicts that can possibly arise from the proposed arrangement. I look out the window to see the words I want to use and the means by which I can most successfully ensure my client’s wishes are cemented into a deal. The good news is this view is billable time.