

A portrait of Trey Apffel, a middle-aged man with short hair, wearing a dark blue pinstriped suit, a white shirt, and a blue patterned tie. He is smiling slightly and looking towards the camera. The background is a courtroom setting with a wooden panel wall. To the left is an American flag, and to the right is the Texas state flag. In the center background, there is a circular seal of the State Bar of Texas featuring a star.

The Man of Law

Trey Apffel takes office as president of the State Bar of Texas.

BY PATRICIA BUSA McCONNICO

TREY APFFEL WAS INTRODUCED TO THE LEGAL PROFESSION AT HIS FAMILY'S KITCHEN TABLE IN THE GULF COAST TOWN OF GALVESTON.

One of six children, his mother ran their busy household while his father worked long hours as a young lawyer. As a kid, Apffel would watch his father as he pored over papers and books. "I remember waking up at two o'clock in the morning because there was a light shining from the dining room, and there he was, preparing for that day's witnesses," said Apffel. On Sunday afternoons, his father would be back at the kitchen table, surrounded by legal pads, depositions, and No. 2 pencils. When Apffel finally got to see his dad argue a case in high school, he was hooked. Not only did his father heavily influence his interest in the law but he also instilled the notion that it took diligence to be successful. "His work ethic rubbed off on me."

Like many boys, his other interest was sports, and his father explained to him the similarities between the two.

"My dad would always tell me that being a trial lawyer was a lot like participating in athletics because you had to prepare, there was competition, and there was a winner and a loser at the end of the day." So Apffel imagined playing football for the Dallas Cowboys and practicing law in the off-season. That dream lasted until an injury prevented him from walking on to the team at Baylor University. So, Apffel decided to focus on academics, and he finished his undergraduate coursework and law school in five years. Shortly after graduation, he married his high-school sweetheart, Karen, and they planted roots in League City.

By the age of 23, the young lawyer had landed his first position at a personal injury law firm in Alvin. He got his start trying all kinds of cases, including workers' compensation cases. Apffel remembers his first experience in the courtroom: a case for a woman who had injured her ankle in a car accident. His boss, who was sitting behind him, would whisper questions in his ear. "I remember we got a

Trey Apffel at the Galveston County Courthouse in Galveston.

\$70,000 verdict. And I can still remember her and her name,” he said. Apffel says his early years prepared him for a legal career. “There were many times when my boss would come in on a Friday afternoon and drop a file on my desk and say, ‘Go try this Monday.’ It was baptism by fire, a character-building time of my life. And I was fortunate to have some great mentors.”

Apffel partnered with several different lawyers until 1994, when he went out on his own and founded Apffel Law Firm. Since then, he has practiced almost exclusively in Galveston, Brazoria, and Harris counties. He moved his offices to League City in 2006, where he continues to have a successful personal injury and family law practice.

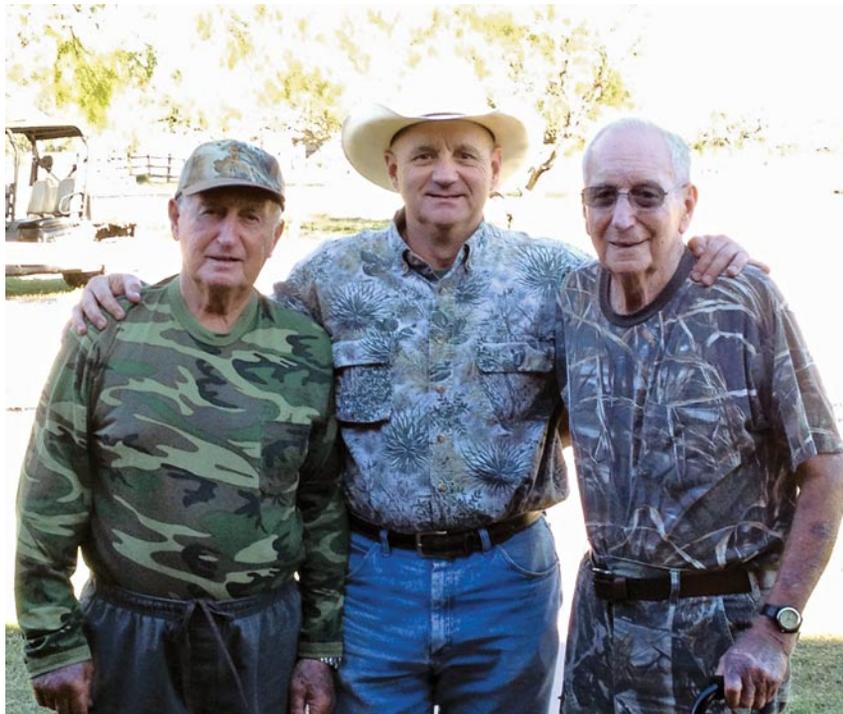
In the early years, Apffel and Karen kept busy as young parents with growing children, and Apffel became a member of the Galveston County Young Lawyers Association and the Galveston County Bar Association, which was founded in 1868 and is one of the oldest bar associations in Texas. However, he didn’t get involved right away. “I was not very active in my early years, going to the occasional lunch meeting,” he admitted. “But I became more involved as the years progressed, and I saw the benefit of having a strong and informed local bar association and how it could help its members.”

Since then, Apffel has served in a variety of leadership and service positions at local and state levels. In 1994, Apffel co-founded the Galveston County Bar Association’s Ad Litem Seminar, where other lawyers could obtain firsthand experience on how to be a court-appointed ad litem on behalf of minors. Then, in 1996, Apffel was elected president of the Galveston County Bar Association. Around the same time, Apffel’s early mentors suggested he serve as a director of the State Bar. He ran unopposed, was elected, and served for three years. During his last year, he chaired the Legislative Policy Committee, and he was asked if he would consider running for State Bar president. But Apffel felt it wasn’t the right time. “At that point, our kids were very involved in sports and other activities. I just didn’t think I could dedicate the time the job required,” he explained. Instead, he committed to serve a three-year term on the Commission for Lawyer Discipline. “I saw how our profession benefits from having the authority and ability to govern ourselves,” Apffel said. “It reaffirmed for me that self-governance of the legal profession must remain one of our top priorities as we move forward.” Following that position,

he served on the Texas Bar Foundation Board, an experience that solidified his belief that the State Bar’s programs benefit its members and the public.

Apffel also dedicated time and energy to his local community as a board member of the Bay Area Council of the Boy Scouts of America, a school board member of his Catholic high school, and the booster club president of two of the 5A Clear Creek High School athletic programs.

Apffel is known for his professionalism, devotion to his family, and respect for his community and clients. “He’s the



Trey Apffel with his uncle, RA (left), and father, Ervin, both 50-year lawyers, during a hunting trip in South Texas.

epitome of a great person and great attorney,” said Doryn Glenn, attorney and director of governmental affairs for Galveston County. Glenn, who has been practicing since 1992, first met Apffel in the summer of 1986 when she worked for the district clerk’s office. “It is a tough practice, the legal practice. You do make friends, but you do make enemies. I would say that the way Trey has conducted himself personally and professionally throughout his career has made him almost universally respected and admired.” Glenn also remembered Apffel taking his young daughters to the courthouse to teach them about what he did for a living, like his own father had. “I was always impressed by his ability to balance being a great practitioner and an active father,” she said.

For Apffel, family was—and still is—very important. He speaks fondly of the times he went fishing with his father. “Dad would wake me up on Saturday mornings



Trey Appfel poses with friends and family on Easter weekend. Appfel and his wife, Karen, started the annual get-together held at their house on Galveston Bay about 15 years ago.

when I was a little boy to go fish,” he recounted. “We had a boat, but no motor. He would row out to a spot. We didn’t have an anchor, so we would have to tie up to the channel marker.” On one excursion, when he was five years old, his father accidentally hooked him in the head, and a trip to the emergency room ensued. Today, Appfel laughs about the incident. “He should have just told me to duck!” Fishing the Galveston jetties has since become a summertime ritual for his family. He has devoted many weekends trying to catch “the big one” with his children and now spends most of his fishing time with his many nieces and nephews, passing on techniques and “secret spots” to the next generation.

Appfel’s three children followed in their dad’s footsteps by attending Baylor University and have found their own passions—Sarah is a doctoral candidate in Spanish literature at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Ross is an electrical engineer with Bechtel Corp. and attends South Texas College of Law as a part-time student, and Kate is a child life specialist who works as a nanny in

Houston. The family gathers often, and when they can’t watch Baylor football together, they exchange lively group texts about the games. Easter weekend is always a time of reunion, when everyone travels to the house on Galveston Bay for a fish fry. “Karen and I started doing that probably 15 years ago, and it has grown,” he said. Of the nearly 80 people who attend, about half of the group is family and the rest are friends and neighbors, many of whom are attorneys. Appfel says of the annual event, “We cook. We play. We fish. Anything but work!”

But for Appfel, his passion for law and service is never far from his mind. “I decided on communications as my presidential initiative primarily because of last year’s president-elect race,” he explained while discussing his upcoming year as president of the State Bar. He said the numerous emails and social media discussions during the campaign made him realize the importance of informed communication among bar members. For example, Appfel stressed the value of reaching out to membership on the local level in order to publicize bar resources and benefits. “Our local bar



FROM LEFT: Trey Appfel clowning around on the playground, admiring the day’s catch with his father, and giving a speech during his junior year in high school.



The Apffel family spends quality time together every Easter weekend. Front row from left, Sarah Cegelski, Kate Apffel, Karen Apffel, and Jennifer Hyde (Ross's fiancée). Back row from left, Jeff Cegelski, Trey Boyd (Kate's fiancé), Trey Apffel, and Ross Apffel.

outreach effort has been a great success this past year, and we plan on expanding that effort to reach more small firm and solo practitioners. I have always felt that the true value of the State Bar is to guide and assist the local bars so that they can benefit their members without always having to reinvent the wheel. We have the resources and tools available to help them help their members; we just need to keep getting the word out. We will continue our ongoing social media efforts, refresh the design of the State Bar website, and engage members in every form of media we can. We have a great product. We just need to promote it so that the State Bar stays relevant to our members.”

Staying relevant means not only reaching members through a new communications effort but also addressing other issues that are facing the profession. “The State Bar has to speak on behalf of all lawyers with a unified voice on issues that affect the legal profession and the clients we represent.” Apffel reiterated that lawyers at every stage need support. “We have to work to find ways to lessen the effects of a turbulent job market for younger lawyers and also provide a comfort zone for attorneys as they practice into their later years. I have seen the legal climate change drastically over 33 years,” he said. “Some incredible lawyers who were members of top tier firms—I don’t even know where they are anymore. That shouldn’t be the case.”

Apffel will be the third consecutive State Bar president to hail from a small firm or solo practice environment. During our interview, he emphasized his goals for his upcoming term. “I believe it is vital that we demonstrate to all our members that the State Bar leadership understands the daily challenges that a majority of our members face, and that we realize what is important to them in terms of resources. We want to assist them in making their practices more productive and their lives less stressful.” Supporting Texas lawyers is significant to all Texans, he added. “We must ensure that everyone has equal rights in every aspect of our justice system. We must protect the rule of law so that accountability and responsibility are not lost on our society.”

Apffel knows that in one year, he will not be able to wave a magic wand and make everything run perfectly. What he can do, however, is employ the same work ethic he learned from his father as a young boy on the Gulf Coast. Apffel has plans to put in whatever time and effort are necessary to improve the State Bar’s communications, resources, and relevancy this year. Whether you catch him in the fishing boat or on the State Bar circuit, you’ll be greeted with a big smile, a hearty laugh, and an attentive ear. Apffel believes whole-heartedly in his mantra: “I stand by and with all lawyers.” **TBJ**