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Father-child lawyer teams savor closeness

By John Flynn Rooney
Law Bulletin staff writer

When Michelle M. Montgomery first brought a real estate law case to trial last year, her father, James D. Montgomery, served as her “second chair.”

“He saved me,” she said of her father, a prominent veteran trial lawyer.

Michelle, 47, said while she handled the direct and cross-examination of witnesses, her father handled all the objections because she hadn’t tried a case before. They prevailed in the trial, she said.

“He understood courtroom procedure,” she said. “He could do it in his sleep.”

The father and daughter are preparing another case for trial, but the roles will be reversed.

“This is big money involved,” she said. “He’s definitely the lead in this.”

She handles briefs and research for the case.

“I find it very helpful that she could use her knack at legal research to bring us up to snuff on where we are on the case,” the elder Montgomery said.

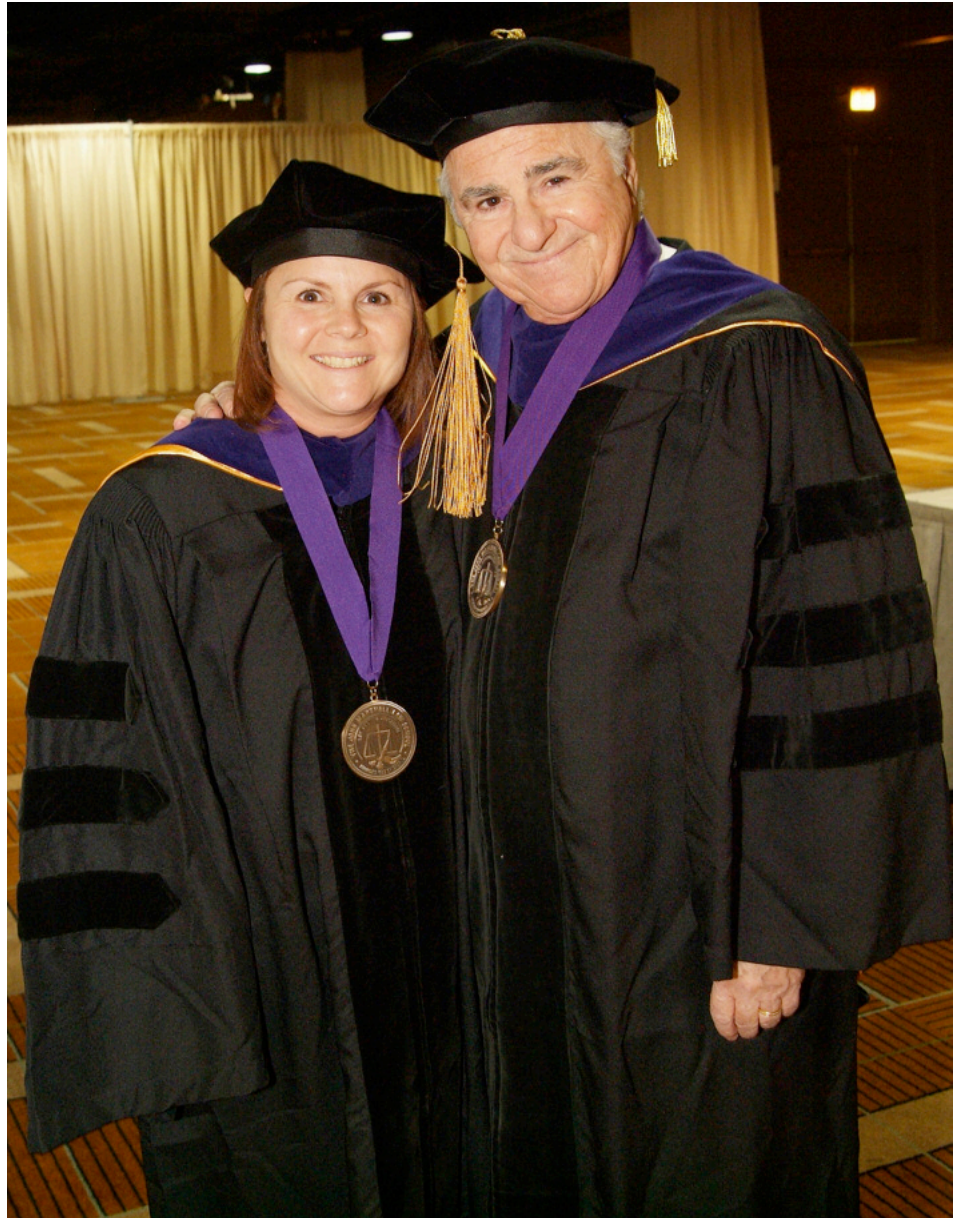
James D. Montgomery Jr. is a partner and trial lawyer with his father’s law firm, James D. Montgomery and Associates Ltd. The elder Montgomery’s wife, Pauline, has worked as the firm’s office manager since the 1980s.

“She pulls me in to help her with stuff,” Michelle said. “It’s a regular family affair.”

After Michelle was laid off from a Chicago law firm several years ago her father helped her develop her own transactional practice in his office. She has worked there since 2007.

The Law Bulletin also interviewed in advance of Father’s Day three other father-child lawyer combinations — Leonard F. Amari and Katherine A. Amari; Jon L. Beermann and Marc J. Beermann; along with Paul B. Ankin and Howard H. Ankin.

James D. Montgomery Jr., 52, also worked at other legal jobs before joining his father’s firm, which focuses on personal-injury and wrongful death cases. He graduated from the University of Illinois Law School in 1982 and was admitted to the Illinois bar that year. He worked in the tax



department for the accounting firm of Coopers & Lybrand, now known as PricewaterhouseCoopers.

Leonard Amari and his daughter Katherine Amari are in their presidential roles at The John Marshall Law School graduation in January 2010. Leonard is president of the law school’s Board of Trustees and Katherine is now immediate past president of the school’s Alumni Association. They are one example of several father-child combinations working together at the same firms.

When the elder Montgomery became Chicago corporation counsel in 1983, he

asked his namesake son to help out with his law practice. He returned to his private law practice in 1986.

The following year, his son left and went

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to work for McDonald's Corp., where he remained until 2004, when he rejoined his father's law firm.

Father and son acknowledged there were tensions between them when they worked together in the 1980s.

"Early on, I was in a mode of building," James Montgomery Jr. said. "He was in a mode of maintaining."

"We just had different goals," the younger Montgomery said. "Of late, our goals are more alike."

James Montgomery Sr. 78, said, "It's better now that we've matured."

Michelle said her father has mellowed.

"I can see where there was that tension 20-odd years ago," Michelle said. "They just seemed to have learned how to work well together."

Katherine Amari, 40, worked as her father's secretary before attending The John Marshall Law School and graduated from there in 2000. She worked for four years for the Cook County state's attorney's office, handling real estate tax matters.

She joined Amari & Locallo in 2004.

"There's definitely a comfort level," she said of working at her father's law firm.

Name partner Joseph F. Locallo Jr.'s son, Joseph F. Locallo III, also works at the firm.

Leonard Amari, 67, a past president of the Illinois State Bar Association and the Justinian Society of Lawyers, said he enjoys seeing his daughter every day.

"I still see her as a little girl crawling on the furniture every day," said Leonard, president of The John Marshall Law School board of trustees. "Of course, this little girl is now immediate past president of The John Marshall Law School Alumni Association Board and president-elect of the Justinian Society."

Katherine, who is also a member of the ISBA Assembly, said "she wasn't in any way following in [her father's] footsteps. That's just the way my life chose me to go."

Marc Beermann, 38, is a third-generation lawyer.

"Fortunately, I come from good genes when it comes to attorneys," said Marc Beermann with the Law Offices of Beermann & de Bruyne in Libertyville, which concentrates on family law.

"I think it's worked out fine," said Jon Beermann, 70. "We've never really had any kind of conflict over anything."

Howard Ankin recalled that as a child he toted his father's briefcase and watched him at work in Daley Center courtrooms.

"There was no question that I was going to become a lawyer," said Howard, 42, of Ankin Law Offices in Chicago.

About a decade ago, Howard and his father, Paul, worked on a personal-injury case together. Howard suggested to his father that they bring in a co-counsel to work on the case.

"My father told me there was nothing doing," Howard said. "I was going to handle the case; we were partners together."

At the final pretrial, the case settled for \$2.6 million, he said.

"My father has always made sure to foster my growth as a lawyer and to make sure our law practice was to be a success."

There could be eventually be another Ankin in the legal profession, said Paul Ankin, 67.

Howard's son, Myles, 3, sometimes comes to the law office and helps his grandfather shred paper and with other matters.

"I think if Myles has the same interests, Howard will have the same reward that I do," Paul said.