Charles O. Fisher '47

Intelligence, confidence and modesty are words that immediately come to mind when describing Charles O. Fisher '47. Fisher has been in practice since 1946 and is co-founder of Walsh & Fisher, a tight-knit, full-service law firm located in the historic and growing Carroll County hub known as Westminster, Maryland. This year marks the 100th anniversary of the firm, the 50th year of his leadership, and his 50th year as a practicing attorney in the state of Maryland.

Our choice to feature him as one of our two profiled alumni was an easy one. After all, how many people work for five decades, let alone in the same career, in the same location, or with the same firm? In this case, success breeds longevity. And if he has his way, he'll be practicing for another 50 years. "I can't think of anything else I would rather do," he says. "My passion in life is the intellectual stimulation I get from practicing law and as long as I maintain the mental facilities, I'll work."

Born in Washington, D.C., his parents moved him to Westminster when he was four years old. They bought a house in 1924 that Fisher still calls home with Margaret, his wife of 54 years. As a youngster, he got to know the players in the Carroll County legal system by doing odd jobs for them. He didn't know it at the time, but these odd jobs would help shape his career, and eventually his life.

In 1938, he graduated from Loyola College in Baltimore and that same year was admitted to the evening program at the University of Maryland School of Law. He worked at the Department of Public Welfare during the day and attended classes three evenings a week. The Second World War interrupted his studies in 1940 when he entered the Army as a private and left five years later as a captain.

Returning to Westminster in 1946, one of the distinguished attorneys for whom he used to run errands as a child, D. Eugene Walsh, asked Fisher
to join his practice as the second principal. Since the war had interrupted his education, he still needed to complete his last year of law school in order to receive his degree. With the opportunity to join one of the early and successful lawyers in the county hanging in the balance, he decided to file a petition in the Court of Appeals to take the bar exam prior to receiving his degree. He was granted that right and passed the bar on his first try in the summer of ’46. Later that year he went back to finish his law school education and received his degree in 1947. “A glorious day,” he recalls.

His practice keeps him busy, but he still manages to find time to give back to his community and his profession. As a co-founder of Carroll County General Hospital, he has served as president, director and member of the executive committee since 1961. In addition to many other community activities, he is also a trustee of the Union Mills Homestead Foundation and director of New Windsor State Bank. He is serving his 10th year as chair of Maryland’s Health Services Cost Review Commission.

As a past president of the Maryland State Bar Association and the Maryland Institute for the Continued Professional Education of Lawyers, he has seen much change in the profession over the years and admits most of it has been for the better. “When I first started, a handshake in this town sealed a deal, people simply stayed good to their word,” he recounts smiling. “Things are more complicated today, and the profession has made necessary changes to keep things in order.”

And in a career that spans 50 years, one might think that one or two particular cases stand out as most memorable. Fisher recalls many, and with exact detail and ardent fervor. He beams with satisfaction and fulfillment, carefully recounting the facts and ultimate results of his most memorable triumphs. “The amount of knowledge you gain about so many different aspects of life as a result of digging into the facts of these cases is truly remarkable,” he says proudly.

In one case he represented the owners of a stone quarry in Carroll County. They were being sued by the adjacent landowners who claimed that pumping water out of the quarry during mining deprived them of subterranean waters, and the pumping had created sinkholes on their property. “To think that as legal counsel I would learn about the operation of a quarry and the drawing of subterranean waters, something that most people have no idea occurs, is simply fascinating.” Fisher notes. The case made its way to the Court of Appeals, which upheld an old English case stating that an individual or company had every right to draw subterranean waters without liability to adjoining landowners. The precedent still stands today.

Fisher’s knowledge, no doubt, has been passed along to other generations of his family. He and Margaret have raised eight children, three of whom are attorneys, two having graduated from the School of Law. Fisher’s oldest son, Charles, Jr. ’69, has worked with his father at Walsh & Fisher for twenty-two years. His daughter, Miriam Fisher ’85, is with the D.C. firm of Morgan, Lewis & Bockius specializing in tax litigation. Now, the third generation of Fishers has joined the ranks of alumni. His granddaughter, Maura Fisher ’94, recently clerked for Judge Luke K. Burns in the Circuit Court for Carroll County and is now associated with a Baltimore law firm.

One might think that a person who has practiced law for half a century might consider hanging it up to take time for recreation. Not Charles Fisher. Although he enjoys reading, traveling and community affairs when he’s not lawyering, he has no plans to slow down. “Given another chance, I wouldn’t change a thing. I’ve found the thing in life that makes me happy. Why mess with that? I feel as though I’m one of the most fortunate people alive.”

David Carrera is the editor of JD and the director of the annual fund and alumni programs.