

RENAISSANCE

Littler attorney finds creative outlets as author, game designer and art curator

By Melissa Rubalcaba Riské

Michael Wilder has many titles. Attorney, shareholder and chairman of the board of directors at Littler law firm are just a few. He's also an author, board-game designer, artist and art curator.

When he was a young man, he found himself at a crossroad. Should he continue to pursue his passion for the arts? Or should he stay on the course to become a lawyer?

He decided to walk down the legal path. But his creativity, imagination and artistic talents emerge in his hobbies that include writing novels, designing entertaining games and supporting young, emerging artists.

"One of my goals is to inspire people," Wilder said.

GETTING IT DOWN ON PAPER

Wilder's first book, the non-fiction "The Playbook for a Dollar & a Dream," was released in 2016. It weaves real-life advice with humor and offers a road map to help teens and young adults understand how to pursue their academic dreams while maintaining fiscal responsibility. He found inspiration in his journey as a student navigating to become a lawyer. The book explores finding one's purpose in life and finishing college without racking up a huge debt.

"I'm a first-generation college grad, after my older sister. My parents' advice was 'go to college' and after that, the advice ran out," he said. "This book can help others so they don't have to stumble."

FAST LEARNER

After graduating high school, Wilder attended Michigan State University with his sights set on a career in law. He said he wanted to be a lawyer since he was 7 years old. He was inspired by movies

with passionate attorneys and his love for politics. He selected IIT Chicago Kent College of Law because of its strong Labor and Employment Certificate program.

As a child, Wilder witnessed his father face issues in the workplace, sparking a passion for the power of the law. He was introduced to Littler as a summer intern and immediately knew it was where he wanted to work. After graduating from law school, he joined the firm full-time and has been leaping at opportunities since then. He was named partner in 2013, he's led firm recruitment efforts and joined the firm's diversity and inclusion council in 2017.

"I've had some hats," he said with a laugh and looking back on the commitments he accepted beyond his role as a litigator.

For Wilder, recruitment was about more than finding people with various skills and stories. It was about asking tough questions like how his firm can retain, mentor and ensure that its talent feels appreciated and invested in the firm. That will foster loyalty and keep them at Littler for a long time, Wilder said.

"The longer you stay, the more you know and the more you invest in (the firm)," he said. "And (the firm) invests in you."

Wilder believes that the push for diversity is creating a place and opportunities for people to see themselves as a part of the story. It inspired Wilder to form the Black Men Lawyers' Association in 2017 in Chicago.

"The goal was creating an organization for Black male lawyers (who) could

share success and fellowship," he said. "We started our organization in Chicago and it has become a global organization in the past five years."

Today, the organization boasts more than 800 Black members that include lawyers, judges and paralegals. Among the organization's efforts is fundraising to support student scholarships.

GAME ON

Growing up in Detroit, Wilder remembers Sundays as special days with family. He often spent his Sunday afternoons at his grandparents' home, along with his parents, sister, cousins and other members of the extended family. They often played Scrabble or card games, especially spades. Adults played at one table, children at another.

Wilder was inspired to create Rep Your City! Detroit, a board game that combines trivia about the city with game obstacles and challenges. Players will want to



Photo by
Mike Jue

demonstrate their deep knowledge of their city, advancing in the game and aiming to win the key to the city.

MAN



Photo by
Kai Brown

Wilder formed Wilder World Productions, LLC to launch his Rep Your City! games. He started selling the games on a website and in a few pop-up shop locations and said he was pleased to see the game soon picked up a following.

At the urging of his local friends, Wilder designed Rep Your City! Chicago and he is in the process of creating more versions for other cities, taking the time to travel to each city and study its history, culture and more to build the questions for the game.

"I want it to be genuine to the city," Wilder said.

The game is available online and at Gamers Worlds locations in the Chicago area, including at Water Tower Place in downtown Chicago.

During the pandemic, Wilder developed an offshoot version of his game — Rep Your Music! This game bridges skills and musical knowledge, including his personal love of hip hop, R&B and some older pop music.

"I wanted people to have some fun, even if we couldn't be together because of COVID," he said. The game could be played via Zoom, with just enough competition to make it fun and lively.

IN THE EYE OF THE BEHOLDER

When he was still in high school, Wilder had a conversation about his future with his mom. He thought about pursuing his talents in painting and drawing. But his mother offered practical advice: stick with law and find a career that will support you. Wilder took her advice, but didn't give up his love of art.

During the last 10 years, Wilder has also started investing in art. Aside from the pieces that decorate his home, he's created a gallery to showcase some of his favorites. He's even invested in a few up-and-coming Black artists from Chicago and Detroit.

Lawyers spend their days writing briefs and preparing arguments. But for Wilder, the writing doesn't end when he gets home. This spring, his third book will be released and he's already crafting the fourth. He generally writes between 11:30 p.m. and 2:30 a.m., and he's deadline driven. His second book, "Jackpot," is a romantic comedy and his upcoming book will be a thriller.

It's been a whirlwind, but Wilder doesn't plan on slowing down. In January, he started a three-year term as Littler's chairman of the board of directors. The firm boasts roughly 1,700 attorneys throughout more than 100 offices in 28 countries across four continents. At 41, he is the youngest chairman of the board in the firm's history.

"It happened fast," Wilder said. "I'm very fortunate to be voted in. It's humbling."

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