



THE RIGHT TRACK

When a young Michael George started working for the Union Pacific Railroad, he thought it was a good job, with good benefits. But as time went on, those benefits began to fade. Advancement possibilities dwindled and George became disillusioned. So much so, that at age 40, he found himself looking for a new career, one that would afford him personal satisfaction and support his wife and six children, who range in age from three to 18.

After some career counseling, George discovered he was suited to the law. He did a little soul-searching, discussed the subject with his wife, Cecilia, and decided to take a two-year, salaried buy-out offered by the railroad and go to law school full time. Once he had made that decision, it was time to select a law school, and that, George says, was the easy part.

"The people who were attending the School of Law seemed to be happy, seemed to be enjoying their educational experience," George said. "Most people I knew who had been to law school here had nothing but positive things to say about the experience. I figured law school is tough enough, and with my situation, with six kids, I didn't want it to be unpleasant."

George graduated *magna cum laude* last December, two and a half years after he started. He recently joined Sandberg, Phoenix & von Gontard as an associate. His

MICHAEL GEORGE

BY LINDA BILLINGSLEY

practice focuses on medical malpractice and product liability.

Coming from a large family, and thinking of his own large family, George says, is what helped solidify his decision to go to law school. "In my family, it was more, 'you need to go out and get a job to make money'. There wasn't a chance to look at talent and aptitude. With my kids, I tell them all the time to do what they can do and live up to their potential. I realized I wasn't living up to my potential."

But George didn't fully realize what his potential was until he walked into law school. Expecting to make C grades, he says he was surprised and "humbled" by the steady stream of As he earned. "When I walked in the door here, I thought I was a complete person, but I have grown 500 percent since I came here. What you are

exposed to here can't be underrated. The minds of the professors and the intellectual environment here are things that improve us."

George believes that being an older student helped him get through law school and he adds that the School provides a supportive atmosphere. "Older students are less likely to let themselves get pushed around by life," George said. "I've seen children born, I've had 9 inches of water in my basement and cars that won't start. At school, I'll take a final exam and it's a real high-pressure situation. Then I go home and somebody wants to throw a ball in the backyard or I have to feed the dog. I mean, it puts it in perspective."

George says making a fresh start down a new path is a little daunting, but worth it for anyone who doesn't believe they are reaching their full potential.

"The best thing I can say to someone considering a career change or boosting their career is to look to the law. A J.D. is so much more valuable in the marketplace than a master's or even an MBA. It really gives you a leg up," George says. "You just have to hold on to your motivation here and you can stay on track. I really believe, frankly, that I've gotten a better education here than I could have gotten at Harvard because of the positive environment. This institution has the power to change people, and the profession has the power to change lives." ■ ■ ■ ■ ■