

Doing Good Work In The Fine Arts

Hartford attorney ends term guiding the Wadsworth Atheneum

By **DOUGLAS S. MALAN**

Coleman Casey finally has time to get back to practicing law.

Actually, he has always kept a full caseload as partner at Shipman & Goodwin, even while taking on his various volunteer roles within the Hartford arts community. But his recent stint as board president of the Wadsworth Atheneum museum forced him to juggle his profession and outside interests like never before.

Casey began his presidency in November 2005, and in August 2007, he also took over as acting director of the museum when the former director resigned.

This spring, the museum found a new director, and Casey's term as board president ended last month. He had been spending 20 to 30 hours a week on Atheneum business, a commitment that has been drastically reduced.

"I have nothing to do," Casey joked. Holding both museum positions and practicing law created a hectic schedule. "That's why BlackBerrys were invented, so you can do three things at once."

At his final meeting as board president last month, Casey was presented the museum's Goodwin Medal for his loyalty and dedication.

His dedication stretches back to 1990 when he joined the board of the oldest museum in America. Casey has long been involved in the arts in Hartford going back more than three decades when he came to Hartford to practice at Shipman & Goodwin. He was impressed by the arts culture in a city the size of Hartford.

"As a young person, I thought I could get involved and make a difference," said Casey, who is 61. "I believe in arts and culture as an important part of the fabric of the community."

Over the years, Casey has served as the director of the Greater Hartford Arts Council; director and president of the Hartford Sym-

phony Orchestra; and president of the Mark Twain House. He remains involved with those organizations. "Since childhood, I've always been interested in the visual arts, theater and music," Casey said.

As a business attorney handling detail- and task-oriented projects on a daily basis, Casey said that artistic expression and the law offer different types of stimulation. "All of these engage your intellect, just different parts of your intellect," said Casey.

For several years, the business attorney hosted a classical music show on Connecticut Public Radio, during which he reviewed new classical recordings from his vast personal collection. At the Atheneum.

New Director

In his three years at the helm of the Wadsworth Atheneum, Casey said he and the board accomplished several goals that will pay off in the long run.

The first was hiring Susan Talbott away from the Smithsonian Institution this year to serve as the museum's new director. "That was terribly significant and important," said Casey, who served on the director search committee.

Another strategic move was giving up the idea of acquiring the old *Hartford Times* building and adding to the museum's square footage. The move would have saddled the museum with debt that in hindsight might have sunk it. Abandoning the expansion plan "was a difficult decision, but the wisdom of the decision has been borne out," Casey said.

Last December, the Atheneum secured \$15 million in bonds to begin renovations to its buildings—the oldest of which dates to 1842—starting next fall. The age of the buildings is a constant challenge when it comes to maintenance, Casey said, and the money will help ensure that there are no leaky roofs. "For an art museum, that's critical," Casey said.



Gary Lewis

Shipman & Goodwin partner Coleman Casey said that his business law practice and his appreciation for the arts both engage his intellect, 'just different parts.'

Finally, Casey noted that the museum finished with a \$500,000 budget surplus this year, "the first time in many years" the museum finished in the black. Financial success was tied to a wildly successful Impressionist exhibit this spring that attracted 30,000 visitors in three months. "All of this was accomplished by the hard work of the board and other directors," Casey said.

Though his time as president and acting director has ended, Casey is no less dedicated to preserving the Atheneum for future generations. He will continue to spend about 15 hours a week volunteering as board member.

"The Atheneum is one of the great museums of the world, not just the United States," Casey said. "There's no greater pleasure than helping the museum." ■