

# LegalTimes

LAW AND LOBBYING IN THE NATION'S CAPITAL

SEPTEMBER 27, 2004

## TRUSTS AND ESTATES

A Practice Focus

**Steven Widdes**  
Paley, Rothman, Goldstein,  
Rosenberg, Eig & Cooper

Leading  
**LAWYERS**

When Steven Widdes graduated from Drake University Law School in 1976, he first considered going into family law. But he dislikes litigation, and family law involved too much of it for his taste. Still, he wanted to be in a practice where he could counsel families.

So Widdes turned to trusts and estates. For almost 24 years, he has been a trusts and estates practitioner at Paley, Rothman, Goldstein, Rosenberg, Eig & Cooper in Bethesda, Md., where he leads the firm's estate planning and estates and trusts administration practice groups.

After law school, he joined the B'nai B'rith Foundation, a national charity based in the District, where he was a deferred-giving director for about a year and a half. The experience whetted his appetite for estate planning. He then joined the Internal Revenue Service as an attorney in the Estate and Gift Tax Branch for about three years and at night he pursued his master's in taxation at Georgetown University Law Center. In 1981, Widdes joined Paley, Rothman.

"Working with families seemed to work for me rather than, say, being a litigator or working on real estate transactions," Widdes says. "Maybe I'm a frustrated therapist or social worker."

Widdes, 53, gets his satisfaction from helping clients with the personal decisions they are making about their lives.

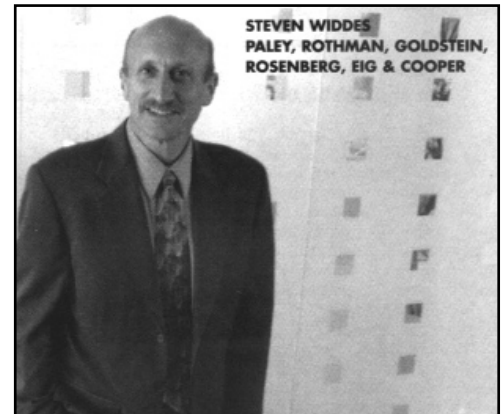
"People may think a will is just a form. It's a final message they're leaving to people," Widdes says.

Widdes says the firm's client roster ranges from those with \$100 million accounts to individuals with a few thousand dollars to their name. Yet it is the wealthier people who have to worry more about tax liabilities on their vast estates, Widdes says.

More than half his clients are Maryland residents, although some live in the District and a few more reside across the Potomac in Virginia. He represents older clients, young professionals, doctors, and lawyers, and several individuals in the high-tech and business fields. Widdes also advises small businesses on management, investment, and real estate deals.

One client and colleague in the estate planning business is Grant Ottenstein of Rockville, Md. Ottenstein, owner of Ottenstein Insurance and Financial Services, says he sends all his clients to Widdes to complete their estate planning. Ottenstein was so impressed with Widdes' work for his clients that Ottenstein hired Widdes to work on his own estate.

"He takes difficult subject matter and can explain it in simple-to-understand terms, which is a good gift to have in estate planning," Ottenstein says. He explains that Widdes will send to clients along with complicated documents a cover letter summarizing and explaining in "plain English" the documents' meaning. "Most people don't know how to read lawyerese," Ottenstein quips.



Widdes is a fellow of the American College of Trust and Estate Counsel and a frequent speaker on estate taxes and estate planning for continuing legal education programs for Montgomery and Prince George's counties, the District of Columbia, and Georgetown University. He also lectures for private educational groups such as Lorman Educational Services.

Widdes seems to have found the practice that suits him best.

"It feels good to know [that] financially and emotionally that the clients can rely on me," Widdes says. "And it does feel that I'm making a difference." ■