

Profile

Hugh McGough

By Meredith L. Lehr

Hugh McGough is a man who hasn't gone very far in life.

This is not to say that Hugh Richard McGough—affectionately known as “McGough” by many—hasn't achieved anything. In fact, Hugh McGough is one of the most accomplished, well-respected and well-loved attorneys in Seattle. His awards, papers, lectures and achievements over his 50-year law career are too numerous to mention. Rather, Hugh McGough hasn't gone far in life because literally, he has not strayed far during his 72 years. He was born, attended school, college, law school and even now is working, all within a four-mile radius of downtown Seattle.

Local Boy Makes Good

Hugh is one of those rarities, a Seattle native. He was born in the old Seattle General Hospital in downtown Seattle on June 9, 1931, the oldest of four children. Hugh's father was an attorney and lobbyist in Seattle for twenty years until he was disabled by a stroke in 1951. Hugh graduated as valedictorian of O'Dea High School in Seattle in 1949. He credits the Christian Brothers of Ireland with providing him an excellent education upon which he built his career. Hugh enrolled at Seattle University, where along with math and physics he took ten hours of economics from Stanley O. McNaughton. Hugh became friends with Stan and stayed in touch with him over the years. In the fall of 1951, Hugh transferred to the University of Washington, earning a B.S.L. (Bachelor of Science and Law) in 1953 and his J.D. in 1954.

Hugh began garnering his many awards and achievements early. In 1951, while at Seattle University, he entered the National Tournament of Orators, a national speaking competition sponsored by the Hearst Newspapers. He proceeded to win Washington State, Pacific Coast Regional, and National awards for oratory, attracting quite a bit of press in the local paper. This experience helped persuade him to attend law school and become a “jury trial lawyer.”

At law school, Hugh continued to achieve: he was Editor-in-Chief of the *Washington Law Review*, received the Carceek Prize for best student article, and was selected to be a member of the Order of the Coif.

We're in the Army Now

Graduation meant that Hugh's student deferment from the Korean War was over. He was drafted into the Army and entered basic training as an enlisted man. He applied for a Judge Advocate General (JAG) commission, which he received in May of 1955.

The Army sent Hugh to Galveston, Texas, to adjust claims arising from the Texas City Disaster.¹ Congress's Texas City Disaster Relief Act provided compensation and mandated that the Army administer the process of adjudicating the relief provided.

Perhaps more importantly, Galveston was where Hugh met Matilda (Teel) Whelton. With a twinkle in his eye, Hugh says that he was a “love starved soldier who never had a chance.” Knowing Teel, however, this author can say that Hugh was one lucky soldier. In 1956, he and Teel were married in Galveston, ensuring that Texas would always be a part of this Irish Catholic boy's life. Even now a Texas flag flies at the McGough home in Magnolia.

When the Army closed the Texas office, Hugh was sent to Fort Lewis where he both prosecuted and defended general courts martial. In 1958, upon leaving active duty, he joined the King County Prosecutor's Office to become a jury trial lawyer.

In 1960 Hugh left the Prosecutor's Office to become a partner in Nickell & McGough, where he practiced general business law with a little criminal defense. At that time, defense attorneys were appointed by the court—and given his prosecution experience, Hugh was appointed for some of the more serious cases. Hugh says that he tried six first-degree murder cases, all of which resulted in convictions. He quickly adds that he prosecuted the first three, and defended the second three.



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The Insurance Connection

Through Hugh's work in the Army Reserve JAG corps, Hugh came to know Fred Orth, General Counsel at Northwestern Mutual Insurance Company. In December of 1962 Fred recruited Hugh by asking him “what it would take” to get Hugh to come to Northwestern. Hugh asked for the princely sum of \$10,000 per year. Visibly shocked, Fred told Hugh that he couldn't start him at such a huge salary, but could likely get him there in a year or so. Thus began Hugh's employment at Northwestern Mutual Insurance Company, and his career as an insurance attorney.

Hugh stayed at Northwestern Mutual (which later changed its name to Unigard Mutual Insurance Company) for the next 32 years. Hugh became General Counsel in 1983 and added the position of Corporate Secretary in 1984. The legal department at Unigard was unusual in that the attorneys functioned both as corporate business lawyers and as the local insurance defense trial and appellate lawyers.

Hugh achieved an outstanding trial record, becoming well known as one of Seattle's leading litigators. Hugh's practice at Unigard also included insurance coverage, excess and surplus lines issues, reinsurance controversies, organizing, licensing, merger, dissolution and sales of insurance companies in various states, advising Unigard's premium finance companies, advising the Boards of Directors, serving as a member on the Boards of Directors, and the many other duties of the General Counsel, from employment to real estate to mergers and acquisitions.

During Hugh's 32 years at Unigard, he became renowned as the area's leading authority on insurance law and issues. According to Karen Weaver, a partner at Soha & Lang whose practice has focused on insurance coverage for over twenty years,

“Hugh McGough has a brilliant intellect, and his knowledge of insurance, insurers and the laws applying to them is unsurpassed.”

In 1994, once again Hugh was recruited into a new job. Stanley O. McNaughton, Hugh's economics instructor at Seattle University 45 years earlier, now Chairman of PEMCO, asked Hugh to take over PEMCO's legal department at the retirement of Ted Cummings, then PEMCO's General Counsel. Hugh was attracted to PEMCO by its history of involvement and service in the community. He joined PEMCO, becoming its General Counsel in December of 1994.

At PEMCO, Hugh advises three insurance companies, plus a publicly held bank holding company, a bank, a credit union, and two technology companies. Hugh's practice at PEMCO is focused on corporate business advice, employment, contracts, Sorbanes-Oxley, privacy issues, regulatory matters and corporate governance, but does not include insurance claims work. He also serves on the Boards of Directors of three of the PEMCO companies.

But There's More to McGough than Insurance

Hugh's belief in public service has led to extensive involvement with both insurance and community organizations. Hugh was on the Board of Directors of the Washington Insurance Guaranty Association from 1986-1994, on the Board of Directors of the Washington Insurance Council from 1990-1994 (during which he served as Treasurer, Vice-President and President), and a member of The Legal Committee of the Alliance of American Insurers from 1983-1994, after being an “alternate” member from 1969-1983.

Hugh served on the Board of Trustees of the Seattle-King County Bar Association

from 1970-73, on the Board of Bar Examiners from 1980-82, the Public Disclosure Commission from 1981-88, acting as its Chairman during 1983-84 and 1986-87, and was a Board Member of the Seattle-King County Chapter of the American Red Cross for the limit of six years, from 1995-2001.

And, not to forget service to his country, upon Hugh's retirement from active duty in 1958, he served in the Army Reserves until 1983, retiring as a Colonel. He served as Branch Director and Instructor of the JAG Branch of the Seattle USAR School from 1964-68, was a Staff Judge Advocate from 1971-73 and Commander and Senior International Law Officer of the 89th JAG Detachment from 1978-83.

Hugh also taught trial practice from 1977-81 and lectured in Insurance Law from 1982-92 at the UW School of Law. He is a prolific writer of articles and a frequent lecturer at CLE seminars.

Hugh served as editor of the Washington State *Bar News* from 1973-74 and editor of the Seattle-King County *Bar Bulletin* from 1971-72. Hugh was also a section editor and author of the first of the pioneering Washington Law Practice desk books, the *Community Property Law Deskbook*.²

One might think that given this extraordinary career, Hugh would be difficult to approach. In fact, he is not only one of the most respected attorneys around, he may well be the best liked! Hugh has a delightful and self-deprecating sense of humor. His life-long friend Dr. Robert Fouty says, “If Hugh were a [U.S.] Supreme Court Justice, we would be well served. He has an intellect which is sharp and sees the complexities put before him, he is very bright, very kind, and very humble.”

Bill Clumpner, Assistant General Counsel at PEMCO, says, “It's a pleasure to work with Hugh. He presents a rare combination of common sense, scholarship, judicious tenacity and good humor.” This author still has the photograph that Hugh sent to the then-CEO of Unigard while visiting New Zealand. In it, Hugh, then wearing a beard, is holding a sign that says:

FREE
Horse Manure
in sacks
(please return sacks)

Hugh's note to the CEO on the back of the picture: “As you can see from the enclosed report, your legal department continues to produce a valuable work product.”

Hugh and Teel have been married 47 years, have raised three successful children (Nancy, Tom and Mary) and now have two grandchildren, Isabel and “little” Hugh McGough, both of whom have a special place in their grandfather's heart. Hugh spends much of his free time, somewhat to Teel's dismay, on his hobby, genealogy. He has created a website of family history, www.magoo.com, “McGough Miscellanea.”

Everyone, on either side of the plaintiff/defense bar, or with whom Hugh has worked, speaks warmly and fondly of him. Says Karen Weaver, “Hugh is simply an outstanding person—witty, smart, personable, supportive and gracious. He is a gem in every way, earning both the respect and the affection of his colleagues and his legal opponents. He is a role model for all that is highest and best in the legal profession.” So, while Hugh has not “gone far” in the sense of distance, in fact, Hugh has “gone far” in all of the most meaningful ways. ■

Meredith L. Lehr is an in-house corporate attorney with over 20 years of diverse business experience. She was fortunate enough to be hired by Mr. McGough at Unigard early in her legal career and work with Mr. McGough at Unigard for almost ten years.

¹ Those local attorneys of a certain age may recall Professor Neil Peck's involvement with the defense of this terrible accident, in which two ships blew up causing 580 deaths and thousands of injuries.

² For those wondering how an insurance lawyer came to write on community property, Hugh and another attorney, Bill Stinnette, had planned to write a community property law book during the mid-fifties, and had written much towards the book. Unfortunately, Bill Stinnette passed away, and the book never came to fruition. Some of Hugh's colleagues knew of those plans, so that when the *Community Property Law Deskbook* was being organized, they asked Hugh to help. The notes for the original book became the basis for the first *Community Property Law Deskbook*.