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PHOTO BY CHRIS CONETZKEY

## THOMAS DUFF

- **About:** Duff is an attorney at his practice, Duff Law Firm P.L.C. He deals mostly with employment law, and a mix of personal injury, car accidents and medical ailments. He was recently selected as the 37th president of the Iowa Association for Justice.
- **Education:** Bachelor's in English at the University of Iowa; law degree with honors from Drake University Law School.
- **Past position:** Attorney, Roxanne Conlin & Associates P.C.
- **Hometown:** Des Moines
- **Age:** 46
- **Family:** Married to Elizabeth Flansburg with two kids, a son James and daughter Emily

We asked Duff, "What is the most interesting case you have ever worked on?" To see his video response go to [www.businessrecord.com](http://www.businessrecord.com) and click on **Briefs & Fixtures** to find this week's Closer Look.

## A Closer Look

### Explain the role of the Iowa Association for Justice (IAJ).

We are an association of almost 1,000 lawyers across the state of Iowa, and our primary goal is to preserve, protect and defend the civil and criminal justice system. There are forces out there that would like to undo the system, and so our mission is to do everything that we can to keep that from happening, and also to hopefully make the system better and more efficient.

### Is there an accomplishment that you are most proud of?

Frankly, being the president of the IAJ is one of my prouder accomplishments. To me it is a very big honor, just because if you look at some of the people that have been our presidents in the past – former Gov. Tom Vilsack, Iowa Rep. Bruce Braley, two Iowa Supreme Court justices and some of the best trial lawyers in the state. So I am certainly honored to be among those, and to have the same job that those people had is quite an honor.

### Talk about how the IAJ gives back to the community.

One of the presidents two years ago had started a project which each successive president has continued to follow up on, and it has become an important part of the organization. It's called Justice In Deed. Basically what it is, every time we have a seminar, we have people bring canned food or donate money to a local shelter. Every president also has a president's outing, and last

year we did flood recovery in Cedar Rapids, where we spent the whole day cleaning out a house. My president's outing will be in August and we are going to do some sort of Habitat for Humanity (project) in Des Moines.

### What is your main goal during your one year as president?

Andrew Mertens is our new communications director, and we have a fairly ambitious plan to do a better job communicating what our mission is and letting the public know how important the civil justice system is. One of the reasons that I became involved in the Iowa Association for Justice, there was a lot of misinformation out there about what lawyers do, and about the civil justice system, and a lot of it went unanswered. I think our association has gotten much better at not only countering the misinformation that is out there, but also kind of promoting the virtues of the civil and criminal justice system.

### What is some of the misinformation you talk about?

One of the classic ones is that we have runaway juries, that juries are out of control, and we have to cap damages because we can't trust the juries. I can't speak for every state in the country, but I can speak for Iowa. Iowa juries are very conservative; they are very smart. A lot of these politicians that say juries are out of control, and you can't trust juries, well you know, the people that sit on the juries are the same

people that elect them to office. So I don't understand why they trust them in the voting booth but not in the jury box. Another misconception is that there is this litigation explosion, there are all these new lawsuits being filed and there are all these personal injury and medical negligence cases being filed every day and it is just out of control. If you look at the statistics, the court filings for civil cases is either down or held steady.

### Is there a trend you have seen over the last couple of years?

I can say certainly that in the last year, since the economy has sort of gone in the tank, I get a lot more calls for employment cases because people have been fired or laid off. So I'm getting more calls. I wouldn't say I'm getting more cases, but I'm getting more people calling and asking questions after they have been terminated or laid off.

### Is there something you would still like to accomplish?

Someday, I mean I've applied for positions as a trial judge before, and that is still something I would like to pursue, but there just haven't been any openings in a while. One of the things that I like about law is I like both writing and persuasive writing, and analysis and analyzing facts of law, and that is a lot of what trial judges do. I also think that I have a really good ability to look at both sides of an issue fairly and objectively.

– Chris Conetzkey