



Chase L. Miller, BA '12, JD '15, and Monte L. Miller, BS '81, JD '84, in the Lyon County Courthouse with Richard E. Miller, Sr.'s, '54, picture.  
Photo by Jeremy Wangler

## A Lasting Impact

*Three Generations of Washburn University School of Law Graduates Impact One Community*

*By Dannie Harris-Cooper*

Alumni know that connections at Washburn University School of Law run deep and often carry a lasting impact in small communities across the country, especially in rural Kansas. The Miller family in Emporia is no exception.

### *Building a Legacy*

As a kid, **Monte L. Miller, BS '81, JD '84**, found himself captivated by his father's work. At just 12 years old, his dad shared insight into one of his cases. His father had been the Ellsworth County attorney and successfully prosecuted a double murder case. Even at a young age, it didn't intimidate Monte. In fact, it had just the opposite effect. It made a lasting impact that would shape his future.

"He let me look through the prosecutor's case file," said Monte. "He showed me the Kansas Reports that talked about the appeal of that case. And there was just something about the actual facts that I knew something about that piqued my interest and I thought, 'that's pretty neat' and that's how it all got started."

**Richard E. Miller, Sr., '54**, began his career in law after earning his undergraduate degree from Kansas State University. He went to Washburn Law and worked as a dispatcher for the Topeka Police Department while earning his degree. He was in private practice and the Ellsworth County attorney from 1954 - 68. After moving to Emporia, Kansas, in 1968, he served as an assistant Lyon County attorney, and was then elected as a juvenile and probate judge before being elected as a 5th Judicial District judge. Before Richard's passing in 1997, he

was heavily involved in the community, volunteering and serving in leadership roles in his church, Emporia Masonic Lodge No. 12, and several bar associations.

Today, Monte and his son, **Chase L. Miller, BA '12, JD '15**, are carrying on his father's legacy and helping the community where he grew up. Like his father before him, Monte began his working career in law enforcement as a Lyon County jailer, then to Chase County as a deputy, then undersheriff, then acting sheriff.

"I was also on the Topeka Police Department when I left Chase County to attend Washburn, so we had that in common," Monte shared. "That law enforcement aspect came from my father. He had a dual career as well, with prosecution and law enforcement. A number of factors came together to make that happen."

After obtaining his law degree, Monte would go on to start Miller & Miller with his father. Coming back home to Emporia was the next logical step in his career.

"My father had left the bench and he had a thriving law practice," he said of making the decision to go back to Emporia. "It was pretty clear he could use some help. It only made sense to come back here where I was somewhat known."

Breaking away from tradition, Chase began his education knowing he would follow in his father's and grandfather's footsteps and ultimately attend law school. He took a more traditional path, first earning his bachelor's degree from Washburn University and going from there straight into law school. His decision to attend Washburn Law would come to the delight of his father, proud that he would continue to carry on the family legacy.

"I couldn't have been happier," Monte shares of the decision. "Obviously the pride of my son wanting to do what I do."

Chase began his journey on the debate team in high school. He would go on to continue with debate at Washburn University, earning a scholarship and winning a national title with the team in parliamentary debate during his sophomore year. Debate was the start of it, but it was far from the only influence on his decision to pursue a career as a lawyer. As a child, he had the opportunity to see firsthand the impact his dad had on their community. He recalls strangers in the community coming up to his dad and being thankful for what his father had done for them.

"There was one time in high school when a younger kid walked up to me and said, 'Hey, I just found out that I was adopted and that your dad handed me to my parents,'" Chase shared. "He was really grateful and that was cool."

Being raised in the culture and working at his father's firm in high school helped to solidify that law school decision, providing a well-rounded perspective before ever enrolling.

Working alongside his dad has had countless benefits.

"We have always had a relationship where we work together really well," he shared. "I get to spend significantly more time with my dad than most people would have with their dads. And I get direct candid access to basically two generations of practical wisdom and knowledge as far as the practice of law goes."

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Earning a degree from his father's alma mater had its benefits as well. Both Monte and Chase had many of the same instructors during their time at Washburn, including Professor Michael Kaye and Professor James M. Concannon.

"Having the same professors and having the same culture to be raised in as a young attorney is important to the continuity of the practice of law and the administration of justice. To have that through Washburn, I'm very appreciative of that," said Chase.

### *Civic Commitment*

Their education is not the only thing this father-son duo has in common. Both share a passion for their community as well as an enthusiasm for high speeds.

On a beautiful sunny day, Monte prefers the open air to the confines of a desk. It's not unusual to find him in his leathers, enjoying the breeze from the back of a motorcycle. As a member of Fire & Iron M.C. (Motorcycle Club), some of his rides are to the benefit of others. Fire and Iron M.C. is a motorcycle club made up of firefighters, emergency workers and others who are associated with the fire service who love to ride and are committed to the Brotherhood that being a firefighter means. Members are comprised of active and retired, full-time/career, paid-on-call, volunteer firefighters, emergency management, dispatchers, mechanics, or inspectors who work in direct support of the fire service. Members of FIMC not only share a passion for protecting the lives and property of the citizens of their communities, but also each other and the open

road. FIMC takes great pride in its efforts to support various charities and rides.

Working as legal counsel for three fire districts in the area for over 30 years, Monte qualified.

Chase, on the other hand, prefers the comfort of his sports car. The importance of giving back to the community for him first revolved around attracting people into his community and economic growth. Like most small towns, Emporia is experiencing a loss of employable adults as people leave to find better opportunities in nearby Wichita and the Kansas City metro area. At the time, he didn't feel as though this had the impact he was hoping for. He has since rededicated his time to providing dignity in defense.

"I try to the best of my ability, to not only deal with direct court things but also collateral issues that come up in criminal defense cases so that to the extent we can we avoid their life collapsing and getting caught in a spiral," Chase shared of working with the community. "I'd like to show that people can remain in the community and be successful."

Both men have also been involved in a number of organizations throughout the community during their careers. The generosity of their time cannot be overstated with involvement in organizations like Hetlinger Developmental Services, Emporia Metropolitan Planning Commission, Emporia Humanitarian Center, Crime Stoppers, and United Way of Emporia, just to name a few.

Even though Monte and Chase are the only two in the family to follow in Richard's legal footsteps, service to others is not new to the rest of the family. Monte's wife, Jackie, a retired state trooper and retired State Regional emergency manager, is now a member of Missouri Task Force One, a FEMA urban search and rescue team and is a member of the Kansas Search and Rescue Program. She also owns Midwest Search and



Monte L. Miller, BS '81, JD '84, with his father, Richard E. Miller, Sr., '54. Photo Submitted

Rescue Solutions where she assists in training first responders in search and rescue. Their daughter, Kaitlyn, has earned her medical degree, and their daughter, Miranda, is a student support advocate.

"If we can help each other without sacrificing ourselves, then it's the right thing to do," said Monte. "I'm honored to be in the profession. I really like helping people. It is so much fun when you can find the solution for someone. Or when they're in a dire situation and you can mitigate the impact on them. The happier you can make people, the happier you're going to be."

