

As seen in



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**Profile of the Week:
Marshall Cohen, Founder, principal,
Cohen & Perfetto LLP**

By: Esther O. Perez

At the age of 66, a time when most people are thinking about retirement, Marshall Cohen, was launching his own law firm. The reason he said he made the decision to embark on such a major plan is simple: His partner, Lou Perfetto.

"Lou is an absolutely spectacular lawyer and business manager. Quite selfishly [partnering with him] will allow me to continue practicing law at a [steady] pace and give him a future he deserves."

One year since starting the firm, Cohen and Perfetto have established a reputation as a boutique business with big capabilities offering unrivalled accessibility to their clients which range from developers to banks; institutional and individual owners; landlords and tenants; lenders and borrowers from middle market to Fortune 500 companies. The firm has represented churches selling off air rights for record high prices to major developers and the past year has closed more self-storage development deals than any other firm in New York.

"Lou really runs this place," said Cohen. "I gave him control of the firm, which will cement his position here and insure my ability to slowly withdraw from the firm as I get older without having to go through succession issues. Leadership was established."

The two men met when Cohen interviewed him for a job at Stadtmauer Bailkin, where he then worked. A client of his had told Cohen about a young neighbor of his who had just graduated law school.

"He had a kind of focus, devotion and competitiveness that were very attractive to me and I took a guess that he would be a terrific lawyer, and a young lawyer that would learn fast," Cohen said of Perfetto's interview.

"It turns out that he was an absolute sponge, he learned faster than anyone I had ever seen and he became a partner of mine in just five years, which is extraordinary in my world."

While Perfetto seemed to have been born to be a lawyer, Cohen's own journey to the profession was somewhat abstract.

In 1961, he graduated summa cure laude from Rutgers College and later earned a PhD in American History from Harvard. He taught history at Harvard and MIT, later receiving his law degree from Columbia University. After many years of teaching, he began his legal career at the age of 36 at the esteemed New York firm, Fried Frank.

After five years, he moved to a partnership at Tenzer Greenblatt before moving on to become a managing partner at Stadtmauer Bailkin.

"It was a process of finding the right place for myself, which ultimately meant going to smaller and smaller firms ... but that took 30 years," laughed Cohen.

Age has not been Cohen's only challenge. Born with a deformed and enlarged right leg and hip, Cohen underwent surgery to receive a prosthetic leg on September 11, 2003. It was a well researched and thought-out plan, which came when he was, 64-years-old, after finding out that it was either life in a wheelchair or amputation. "I'm much better off than I was before, but that's not the normal course of things for people who suffer amputation," said Cohen who learned to walk again six months ahead of schedule.

On October 12, Cohen will be honored at a New York fund-raiser for the Amputee Coalition of America (ACA) at the Harvard club. Cohen became very involved in the ACA even before his surgery, and although he is humbly accepting this honor, he does not feel the honor belongs to him.

"The primary honoree I think is actually my orthopedic surgeon, Dr. Joseph Lane, who is an absolutely brilliant orthopedist, who put together a fantastic team of professionals that made my rehabilitation actually near miraculous," Cohen said.

The lawyer said he learned a lot from Dr. Lane, taking the surgeon's approach to team work and applying it to his own work in the real estate business.

"The real estate market has attracted a lot of new comers into real estate. It's been interesting because they are like sponges. They are very smart and they learn very fast, but they have a lot to learn.

"My background as an educator helps me to teach them what I know and share with them my experience, so that they can hopefully avoid some of the mistakes that they would otherwise have to learn from at a large expense.

"Finally," he added. "I'm in the right place."

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