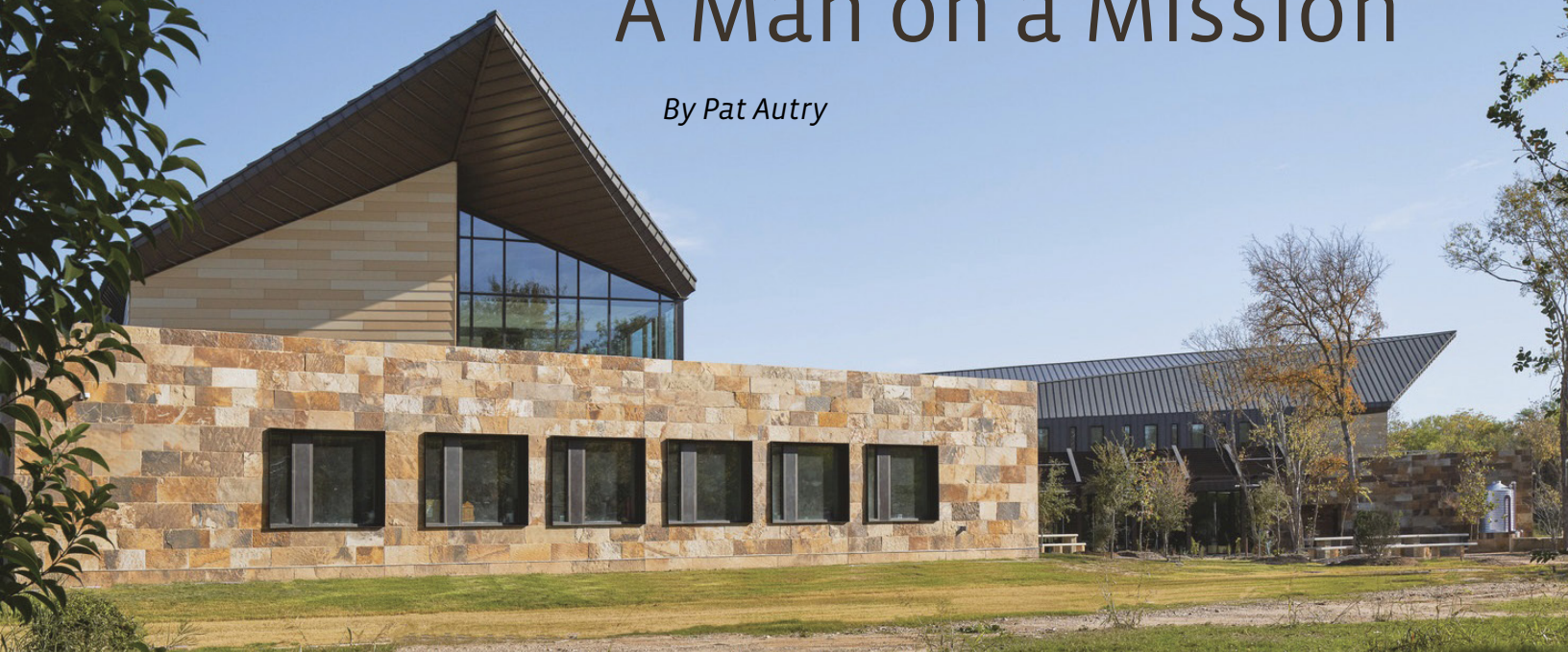


RAY BATTAGLIA: A Man on a Mission

By Pat Autry



Ray Battaglia's passion project is ChildSafe, a local nonprofit that aids abused and neglected children.

These days, Ray Battaglia gets to his office earlier than he ever has in his nearly forty years of law practice. It is not because his practice area, bankruptcy, benefitted from the turmoil of 2020. And it is not because “The Law,” that jealous mistress, demands every waking hour. Rather, it is because, in 2015, Ray decided to practice law differently. He left his shareholder position at Strasburger & Price LLP (now Clark Hill Strasburger) on good and friendly terms and moved his law practice to his home.

Many would resist having their occupation intrude upon the sanctity of their home, but it works for Ray. “I realized that I didn’t need to work 200 hours a month and bill at \$500 an hour in order to make a good living.” Ray, his wife Rachel, and several Huskies live comfortably. And, yes, business has been good. Ray is a bankruptcy lawyer—representing both sophisticated creditors and debtors. He is Board Certified in Business Bankruptcy Law and was one of the founding members of the local Bankruptcy Bar Association and the Larry E. Kelly American Bankruptcy Inn of Court. He spends more time counseling than

he does prepping witnesses or wading through exhibits and discovery. Yet, he is no stranger to the courtroom and is a well-respected and knowledgeable advocate for his clients.

Ray arrived in San Antonio in 1976. His father worked for government contractors in various parts of the United States. Ray was born in Brockton, Massachusetts, and spent his early years in the Northeast. After the family moved to San Antonio, Ray attended and graduated from Churchill High School. His first year and a half of college were spent at Boston College. A victim of the spiraling costs of a private college, he transferred to UT-Austin. He found, though, that burnt orange was not his favorite color, and he finished his undergraduate studies at the University of Texas at San Antonio. He went on to law school at the University of Houston and graduated in 1983.

A summer internship with Oppenheimer, Rosenberg, Kelleher & Wheatley, with John Tate as his mentor, led Ray to his career. The Oppenheimer firm was at, or near, the center of commercial and real estate transactions in the 1970s and 1980s. When the financial



Ray Battaglia

markets contracted in the early 1980s (oil and the mid-1980s (real estate and the savings and loan collapse), “trial by fire” might be a good way to describe the life of the San Antonio bankruptcy lawyer. The prominence of the Oppenheimer firm ensured that, as a young lawyer, Ray was rapidly introduced to



ChildSafe's new facility provides a safe and calm environment where children and their families can be counseled.

complex financing and ownership structures. At Oppenheimer, Ray learned how to critique the deal and counsel the participants.

Forced to select a case that qualifies as his favorite, he would choose his representation of asbestos claimants in the four-year case of ASARCO, one of the world's largest copper mining and refining operations, which filed for bankruptcy relief in Corpus Christi. The asbestos claims arose from a Canadian-based mining operation in the 1970s, which ASARCO had subsequently acquired. Several years of hard-fought litigation and bankruptcy negotiations yielded a very good result for the asbestos claimants. But as significant as the ASARCO case was from a legal and monetary standpoint, Ray also appreciates the personal satisfaction of helping those affected by the financial wreckage of a failed business or a failed marriage.

Ray discovered another way to help individuals, too. Ray's father-in-law, Larry Mathews, a former Assistant United States Attorney, sat on the board of a local nonprofit called ChildSafe, which aids abused and neglected children. ChildSafe is one of about seventy-two child advocacy centers ("CACs") across Texas, acting on referrals from law enforcement and Child Protective Services, facilitating the delicate process of interviewing

and counseling abused children and their protective family members. While the principal goal is to support the child, a CAC also assists in the prevention and prosecution of child abuse. A central goal of a CAC is to take the lead in interviewing the abused child and in keeping that child from having to tell the worst story of his or her life repetitively to doctors, police, prosecutors, defense counsel, and therapists.

ChildSafe originated in 1989 and was then known as the Alamo Children's Advocacy Center. Services were first offered from a facility on U.S. Highway 90 West in

1997. The organization adopted the name "ChildSafe" in 2007. As the mission of ChildSafe developed and expanded, the need for sophisticated financial planning grew with it. Larry Mathews felt that Ray's knowledge and skills would prove useful to the growing organization. Ray has been a member of the ChildSafe board of directors for ten years and has been Chairperson for the last eight. Working closely with Kim Abernethy, the President and CEO of ChildSafe, Ray and the other board members have stabilized the organization and bolstered the confidence that referring organizations must have in a CAC.



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Ray Battaglia and ChildSafe CEO Kim Abernethy stand in the lobby of KSAT News as they publicize “Cardboard Kids,” a community campaign created by ChildSafe to promote awareness of child abuse and neglect in Bexar County.

In August 2019, Child Safe began providing services from its fifteen-acre campus and the Harvey E. Najim Children & Family Center. The campus is located in east San Antonio about where Houston Street bisects IH-10. The 64,000-square-foot center, designed by Overland Partners and constructed by Guido Construction, includes play areas, green spaces, therapy facilities, interview facilities, and the administrative space needed by ChildSafe. Child Protective Services and law enforcement also have suites within the center. The center is a safe and calm environment where the children and their families can be counseled. ChildSafe is the first urban CAC to house a twenty-four-hour crisis intervention center for minor sex trafficking victims, the only CAC in the nation using trauma-based Adventure Therapy, and the only urban center using its natural surroundings as a restorative feature to reduce the impact of first-degree trauma suffered by children and second-degree trauma experienced by frontline staff members.

ChildSafe’s most recent annual service statistics reflect the enormity of the task at hand. In 2020, ChildSafe provided intervention services to more than 5,000 children and their families and conducted nearly 2,000 forensic interviews of children who had made an outcry of abuse. Nearly 6,500 counseling sessions were provided to victims of abuse and their caregivers. All of this happened in a year in which the COVID-19 pandemic restricted opportunities for children

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to make an outcry. “Practicing law can be an all-consuming endeavor with a narrow focus,” Ray observes. “ChildSafe has been an opportunity for me to contribute my time and talent to a truly important mission.”

Ray intends to continue practicing law for the foreseeable future. Having lived through the 1980s, he sees potential for financial restructuring work in the local real estate and construction industries. Beyond that, he envisions practicing a hobby or another vocation yet to be determined when he decides

to reduce the time spent practicing law. And, of course, he will continue to volunteer as long as his participation is valuable to someone. ★



Pat Autry is a member of Branscomb Law in its San Antonio office. He is Vice Chair of the SABA Publications Committee, and he has served as one of the editors of the San Antonio Lawyer® for more than 20 years.