

Two Roetzel partners take on board commitments

SHERRY KARABIN
Legal News Reporter

Published: March 1, 2017

Roetzel & Andress Partner Lewis W. Adkins Jr. has begun serving a nine-year term on The University of Akron Board of Trustees while Partner Stephen Funk rejoined Community Legal Aid Services Inc.'s board of trustees last fall.

He started on Feb. 3 after being appointed to the board by Ohio Gov. John Kasich.

"The University of Akron is one of the main economic engines in the region," said Adkins, who received his juris doctor from UA Law in 1993 and serves as manager of Roetzel's Public Law, Regulatory and Finance Practice Group "As board member I intend to make sure it's fully charged so it can continue to provide a high quality education to students."

Roland Bauer, chairman of The University of Akron Board of Trustees said Adkins was "a great choice." In a statement Bauer said, "He knows and loves this community, and he believes deeply in the University's mission and its critical role in the region.

"His expertise in public law and finance will be valuable to us, especially given the challenges before higher education right now."

Matthew Wilson, president of The University of Akron, agreed.

"He's an exceptional leader in his profession and in our community, and is dedicated to the School of Law," Wilson said in a statement. "I'm so pleased that he is willing to lend his expertise to our University. We will be better because of it."

Born and raised in Roosevelt, New York, Adkins received his bachelor's degree in political science and criminal justice from The City College of New York.

While attending Akron Law, he met his wife Yamini, a U.S. federal mediator in northeast Ohio. The couple lives in Copley Township and has three children—Jaya, a junior at The Ohio State University and twins Lewis and Malini, who attend Copley High School.

He began his career as a law clerk for retired Summit County Court of Common Pleas Judge James R. Williams. Afterwards, he took a job as an assistant prosecutor in the criminal division of the Akron City Prosecutor's Office.

Prior to joining Roetzel & Andress as a partner in 2000, he served as associate general counsel and general counsel in the Summit County Executive's Office and as an associate at Buckingham, Doolittle & Burroughs.

Adkins has remained actively involved in Akron Law since graduating. He helped to start The Honorable James R. and Catherine D. Williams Scholarship Fund, which supports law school students. He also was instrumental in the creation of The Dr. Sylvester Small Endowed Scholarship in Education.

A former board chair at the Akron Urban League, Adkins received the "Livability Award" from the city of Akron in 2009 for his efforts to coordinate the Akron Urban League, Akron Public Schools and the city in building a community learning center.

He's also a member of the Greater Akron Chamber's nominating committee and sits on the Summit County Consumer Affairs Board.

In 2015, he received The University of Akron School of Law J. Dean Carro Professionalism Award from the Black Law Students Association.

Lia Evans, director of alumni and development at Akron Law, said Adkins always makes a point to attend events hosted by the Black Law Students Association and has hosted events for its members.

"He's a good mentor and advocate for Akron Law students, especially members of the Black Law Students Association," said Evans. "We are thrilled to have him on the university's board of trustees."

Adkins, whose appointment extends to July 1, 2025, said his immediate focus as board member is on listening and learning as much as possible.

"There are a lot of issues facing the university and I want to gain a comprehensive understanding so that I can collaborate with the people who want to make positive changes," he said.

Adkins isn't the only partner at Roetzel & Andress to take on a commitment as a board member.

Funk is serving a three-year term on the board and was elected in December 2016 to a one-year term as secretary of the board.

Funk previously sat on the board from 2010 to mid-2012, but resigned to become president-elect and later president of the Akron Bar Association.

As a member of the 18-person board, Funk will be charged with overseeing major policy decisions, promoting and expanding the reach and influence of programs and services and exercising financial oversight.

The organization serves clients in Summit, Stark, Portage, Mahoning, Columbiana, Medina, Trumbull and Wayne counties.

"I am thrilled to be back," said Funk. "Throughout my career, I've always believed that lawyers in particular have a special responsibility to ensure equal access to justice.

"I believe we must all do our part, whether it's doing pro bono work, donating money or serving on the board."

Sara Strattan, former executive director of Community Legal Aid Services, said board members are pleased that Funk has returned.

"Steve has a strong and sincere belief in our mission," said Strattan. "He is always prepared and his contributions to board discussions are always thoughtful and well reasoned.

"In addition to providing pro bono work for our clients and promoting the idea of pro bono service among bar members, Steve has long assisted with the organization's fundraising efforts."

Funk's commitment to pro bono work dates back to his days as a student at Harvard Law School, where he volunteered for the Harvard Legal Aid Bureau, handling housing and domestic relations issues.

Prior to joining Roetzel & Andress in 1998, Funk served as a law clerk to U.S. District Judge Ann Aldrich in the Northern District of Ohio and was a trial attorney and senior litigation counsel for the U.S. Department of Justice in Washington, D.C.

At Roetzel he focuses on business and public law litigation, appellate law, constitutional law, municipal law, real estate and land use and zoning law.

From 2008 to 2010, Funk served on Community Legal Aid's Justice for All Campaign Committee, assisting in the annual fundraising campaigns for Community Legal Aid. He then joined Community Legal Aid's board of trustees in 2010.

Funk also sat on the board of trustees for Northeast Ohio Legal Services from 2010 to 2012 and is a former Hudson City School District Board of Education member and former co-chair of the Citizens Committee for Hudson Schools.

Funk's wife Tracy Thomas serves as John F. Seiberling Chair of Constitutional Law and director of the Constitutional Law Center at The University of Akron School of Law.

They live in Hudson and have two children, Peter, 18, and Caroline, 15.

The former Akron Bar Association president said one of his main goals as board member and secretary at Community Legal Aid Services is to come up with creative ways to fill the financial gaps the organization is facing.

"A third of our budget comes from the Legal Services Corporation, which is funded by Congress," said Funk. "We now have a new administration and we are not sure what changes there might be.

"There has already been a loss of funding in recent years," he said. "We receive money from the state of Ohio based on filing fees and interest on IOLTA (Interest on Lawyers' Trust Accounts) accounts. Interest rates have been low so less funding has been available for legal aid groups throughout Ohio.

"This funding situation has not improved," Funk said. As a result, he said the next three years will "likely be a very challenging time for Community Legal Aid as it struggles to maintain its important mission with limited financial resources."

[\[Back\]](#)