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and overcoming great
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Triumph Over Tragedy

THE LIFE STORY OF **VINCENT J. CAPUTO** INCLUDES TWISTS, TURNS, AND OVERCOMING GREAT ODDS TO BECOME A SUCCESSFUL ATTORNEY WHO ALWAYS PUTS HIS CLIENTS FIRST.

BY **MATT COSENTINO**

PHOTOS BY **JODY ROBINSON**

Vincent Caputo's improbable journey to a thriving law career has been filled with detours, life challenges, and personal redemption.

It's the kind of story that would translate well to the big screen, if it all wasn't so hard to believe. As he recounts his tale, even he has a hard time grasping the obstacles he has faced, sometimes getting overcome by emotion at the thought that his life could easily have taken a tragic turn.

Along with the unwavering support of his wife, Heidi, the one constant that has pushed Caputo

Caputo may have been flourishing professionally, but his personal life was a different story. He battled addiction to alcohol and controlled substances, and he could not seem to overcome his struggles despite multiple attempts to get help. The low point came when he was charged with three DUIs in five years, was forced to sell his landscaping company, and faced the prospect of prison time. Fortunately, the judge, the Honorable William P. Mahon, recognized Caputo's desire to be a better husband and father to his children, and sentenced him to Chester County Recovery Court instead.

Amid his recovery, Caputo went back to college in his 40s and graduated summa cum laude from West Chester University with a degree in criminal justice. He interned under his former defense attorney and close friend, Dawson "Rich" Muth, and chose to pursue a career in law. First he had a few more hurdles to clear: being waitlisted by 10 law schools before being accepted into Widener Law; and, after graduating in two and half years on an accelerated track, being denied entry into the Pennsylvania Bar Association because of his past transgressions.

After winning an appeal, he dove into

through all of the ups and downs is the thirst for knowledge. The trait was instilled in him at a young age by the late pastor Jon Swenson, who served as a mentor early in Caputo's life.

"He died right when I was getting ready to start law school," recalls Caputo, a criminal defense lawyer with his own practice, the Law Office of Vincent J. Caputo, in West Chester. "One of the things he taught me, and this is a mantra I've always lived by, is to be a lifetime learner; to never get to the point where you stop learning, to always be curious, and to always try to better yourself through education. That's a lesson I took very seriously."

That much is clear from Caputo's résumé. After graduating high school, he served his country by enlisting in the U.S. Army. From there he had two lengthy stints in the automotive business, working in roles such as sales manager and finance manager. Seeking a new challenge, he became a licensed stockbroker for one of the largest mutual fund companies in the world, and then transitioned again into entrepreneurship—first, as owner of an Italian restaurant, and then the proprietor of a lawn-fertilization company.

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— VINCENT J. CAPUTO



his private practice, taught himself the ins and outs of the court system, and in just five years has established a stellar reputation. In his very first trial, in which he collaborated with attorney Evan Kelly, he successfully defended a client facing a murder charge. He has since represented more than 700 clients in a wide range of cases.

"I've done very well, but none of that matters if I'm not positively affecting someone's life," he says. "I think the empathy I have for my clients is one of the most important aspects of my law practice. Having been in their shoes before as a defendant, I don't judge. I believe in God and there's a scripture that says, 'Judge not, lest ye be judged.'

"At the end of the day, one of the things I try to do as an attorney is just be me," he continues. "I try to share my experience with clients so they understand they're hiring someone who will answer the phone at night when they call, and will answer the phone on the weekend. I'm pretty much available 24 hours a day for my clients. It's hard on my family sometimes, but I don't know where that person is going to go if I don't pick up the phone."

At the same time that Caputo is showing compassion for his clients, he is working doggedly on their behalf. Part of the job involves "straight-up fighting" for his clients'

rights, and part involves helping clients "get their lives back together and getting them through the criminal process."

"No matter what my client did or didn't do, no matter how much money they may or may not have, there are sometimes constitutional issues and legal issues that need to be addressed to make sure the checks and balances are still being represented in the courts," he adds. "Very often, I see my clients' rights violated. That's another reason I became a lawyer. Being a criminal lawyer allows me to fight for criminal justice."

Consistent with Caputo's history, he is never content to dedicate himself to just one pursuit. He recently reinvented himself once again. An opposing lawyer in a civil litigation he was involved in, James S. Tupitza, was so impressed with how Caputo handled the case that he invited him to assist his firm in the overflow of casework involving real estate issues.

Tupitza & Associates P.C. focuses primarily on matters related to real estate, including transactions and litigation. The firm represents lenders, appraisal management companies, real estate licensees, and property sellers, buyers, and developers. Tupitza, a frequent lecturer and course planner, is intrigued by Caputo's potential.

"We do everything from little houses in Coatesville to very large commercial or

industrial projects," Tupitza says. "Vince is going to dive in and learn about every aspect of our practice. I've never seen a person who's a faster study."

While initially hesitant, Caputo chose to follow Heidi's advice: to approach the new venture just like he has with every other endeavor of his life—head on, with 100 percent commitment. He is excited to add to his areas of expertise, as he and Tupitza share the same philosophy about putting the client above all else, including profit.

"We realize that clients are coming to us because they need help with a problem they can't solve," Caputo says. "Maybe they risk ending up incarcerated, or, in the real estate realm, they're going to end up homeless or with a property that has a lot of issues. We want people to know there are firms and lawyers that don't just care about the money. The individual and the positive result matter." ■

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