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Led by Joseph Marrone, Philadelphia-based **Marrone Law Firm LLC** has earned a national reputation of fighting for the underdog, including the wrongfully convicted.

Even after 30 years at the pinnacle of his profession, Joseph Marrone continues to find new mountains to climb. The founder and managing partner of Marrone Law Firm LLC envisions an even bigger and brighter future for himself and the law firm he leads, which is poised to reach new heights on several fronts.

For Marrone, his representation ranges from catastrophic injury cases, to a victim of police misconduct or medical malpractice, and even those whose life has been upended as a result of being wrongfully convicted for a crime they did not commit. While every case and every client may be unique, one constant in Marrone's work is the courage to stand up and fight for those who face seemingly insurmountable odds.

"That's been the mantra of our entire practice from the beginning," he says. "We're always fighting for the little guy who is up against the goliath, so to speak. That's just the way it's always been, and we've had a lot of success that way. You have to be a fighter, you have to be willing to persevere, and you can't be afraid to go the extra step and get clients where they need to be."

Marrone's rise began in the early 1990s, when he was an advisor to former Pennsylvania Governor and Mayor Ed Rendell on his successful mayoral campaign. The two developed a friendship, and as a result Rendell hired Marrone as an attorney for the city of Philadelphia, which included working as a city solicitor for a number of years. The connections Marrone made and relationships he forged as a member of the Rendell administration inspired him to "take the next step"—starting his own firm.

In 1993, Marrone Law Firm was born. Most of Marrone's earliest clients involved cases pertaining to criminal defense or personal injury, though he has since expanded into more significant civil litigation and civil rights cases. The firm has represented clients in Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and New York, as well as across the country, and has earned a string of successes that have included major settlements and jury verdicts.

Never Back Down

by **MATT COSENTINO** | photos by **JEFF ANDERSON**

of the crimes they've been convicted of."

One of them was William Franklin, who served 44 years in prison after being convicted for a 1976 murder in Philadelphia's Brewerytown neighborhood. Marrone helped Franklin earn his freedom earlier this year. There was also Michael White, who in June 1977 was convicted of robbing and murdering a shopkeeper and sentenced to life in prison without the possibility for parole. Marrone fought to help White regain his freedom in April 2023. All told, White spent nearly 47 years of his life behind bars for a crime he did not commit.

Additionally, Marrone Law Firm has taken on a landmark case: Alexander McClay Williams, who at 16 was the youngest person in Pennsylvania to be executed. The case made national headlines and, after decades of investigation, Williams was exonerated. Now, Marrone has filed a civil rights lawsuit against Delaware County.

"Post-conviction relief work is when the defendant has exhausted his appeals but has subsequently found new evidence to prove their innocence," Marrone says. "You have to re-litigate the case and it gets very complicated and very time-consuming, and most of these defendants have no money or resources.

We've handled a lot of cases pro bono, and that's what inspired the nonprofit that we recently launched, Second Justice."

Second Justice aims to "provide a glimmer of hope" and legal resources to victims of injustice and prosecutorial misconduct. The nonprofit strives to work with communities to reform the legal system, as well as protect human and civil rights through research, advocacy, and investigation; pre-litigation preparation; and litigation support for the post-conviction relief of wrongfully convicted individuals, particularly the indigent and underprivileged.

As Second Justice's successes multiply, so does the demand.

"We need more lawyers to help with those cases," Marrone adds. "It's a war of attrition when you're fighting with the government. It can take months or years to have any kind of success, and that's just one case. There are hundreds of potential cases, so the more lawyers we can get to come on board as Second Justice grows, the better. But we also need to raise money and get governmental support."

The firm continues to be diverse. In one instance, Marrone is suing the New Castle Delaware Police Department for using deadly

force to kill an innocent man. In another, he is representing fallen Temple University police officer Christopher D. Fitzgerald and his family.

Marrone gives back to the community in ways beyond pro bono work. In 2017 he was invited to join the Governing Board of Directors for the nonprofit mentoring organization Big Brothers Big Sisters of Philadelphia – Independence Region. He serves as chair of a signature annual fundraising event called Fashion Touchdown, which partners with the Philadelphia Eagles; the event has raised millions of dollars over the years for BBBS Independence.

Whether his efforts involve philanthropy or legal work, Marrone always strives to do the most good. For clients, he wants current and prospective clients to know that the legal team of Marrone Law Firm will do everything in their power to procure the best outcome, whether that means negotiating a just settlement or going to trial.

"We're always prepared," he says. "That's what being a good lawyer is: believing in your client, standing by your client, and fighting to get the best possible results. You don't know where you're going when you get into these cases, and you just have to press forward and make sure you get the best result."

Considering Marrone's steady ascent to the proverbial top of the mountain, the never-back-down approach seems to have served him quite well. "We went from a small little practice to being nationally known," he says. "We get to be part of some really groundbreaking cases, so that shows us that we've come a long way. Whenever I feel like we've reached the top, it just keeps getting better." ■

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—JOSEPH MARRONE,
MARRONE LAW FIRM LLC

For example, Marrone was part of a group of attorneys who secured the largest personal injury settlement in Pennsylvania history—\$227 million—for victims of the 2013 Philadelphia Salvation Army Thrift Store collapse. He also secured \$32.5 million in a confidential premises liability case in which his client was catastrophically injured, and \$17 million in a medical malpractice case for a client who was left permanently incapacitated with severe neurological damage.

Lately Marrone has been receiving recognition, both locally and nationally, for his efforts to find justice for clients who have served lengthy prison sentences for crimes they did not commit. He cites Walter Ogrod, a Philadelphia man who was exonerated in 2020 after spending nearly three decades in prison for the 1988 murder of a young girl. In 2023, Marrone secured a \$9.1 million settlement of the federal civil rights lawsuit he filed against the city of Philadelphia.

"[Ogrod] served 28 years behind bars as an innocent person, and we were successful in our lawsuit against the city of Philadelphia," he says. "Not only do we litigate civil rights lawsuits, but we fight to get clients exonerated when they are innocent



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For more information about Second Justice,
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