

A Friendly Firm

Relationships Form the Foundation of this Legal Firm

Gary Smith and Jeffrey Craven met at law school, and in their time there became friends when they became reluctant officers at a law fraternity (as they describe it, they were not at the meeting during which the vote occurred). Upon their graduation, they made the plan to work together as their skills and knowledge complimented each other, but life took Smith to North Carolina and Craven to Hawaii.

Years later, Smith moved to Arizona and started to work for a firm in downtown Phoenix that was growing and needed more lawyers. Smith contacted Craven to give him the opportunity, he accepted and was hired to the firm. The two were finally working together, but they wanted more freedoms to own and operate a law firm to the specifics of their visions — one that is dedicated to fostering ongoing relationships with business clients. They planned to open their own firm in 2001. Smith says, "We had the lease in hand and were ready to sign, but September 11 struck that same week and we decided to shelve the idea until the economy stopped rippling." When the two had confidence in the economy once again, the country's entrance into the Second Gulf War happened. This time, however, they were undeterred. Craven says, "Something will always come up." Early 2003 saw the opening of Smith & Craven P.L.L.C.

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Since 2003, the firm has grown from two offices sublet from another firm to its own seven-office suite, and from two people (Smith and Craven) to six. They ascribe their success to solid work ethic, conservative advice and a blunt honesty with clients. The majority of their growth is based on referrals. Smith says, "This is a business of relationships. Unlike many financially-successful firms, we don't shop for disposable one-time clients. Our model is to bring integrity back into the profession and to be legal counselors for the life of your business." Referrals come from existing clients, former potential clients and former opposing parties in the courtroom, and they are made because of the personalities and work ethics of Smith, Craven and their associates.

Smith says, "We like to have fun, but we take our job seriously. We have humility in who we are, and by that, I mean we never think we, as lawyers, are better than someone else. We provide a service, just like any other business." Smith's statement illustrates the respect, honesty and dedication they provide all of their clients. Another example of their honesty and respect is found in their initial consultations with potential clients. Craven explains, "If someone

has a losing or long-shot case, we tell them. We don't like to see people waste time or money on false hopes or long shots. This is the law, not Las Vegas. If you want to gamble, play craps; courtrooms are no place to play the odds."

Smith and Craven have 12 years of experience each as practicing lawyers and are collectively licensed to practice throughout Arizona, Colorado, California, New York, North Carolina and Hawaii. Their 180 plus clients come from throughout the U.S., and most are long-term and include publicly-traded corporations to small mom-and-pop businesses. Although Smith & Craven will cater to those with one-time needs, they prefer to foster relationships with clients. Smith explains, "Most of our clients are new or existing businesses that want to grow, and grow with us. The more we know about the client, the better able we are at predicting and preventing problems and saving them money in legal fees in the long run." He refers to this sort of relationship as counseling, directing clients how to proceed to avoid legal problems, and adds, "Ideally, we want to help clients in their



The Smith & Craven Law Firm
(Jeffrey Craven far left; Gary Smith far right)

transactions so they can avoid later disagreements, but even if that isn't possible, we are very adroit in the courtroom."

The Smith & Craven office is based around technology, which allows them to be a paperless and efficient office. All documents are kept as digital images and stored in a database that is quick and easy to search. This allows for work product that could usually take hours to be formulated in minutes. It also allows for the entire office to research a case at the same time. Many Arizona courtrooms are also in the process of updating to technology-based equipment, with monitors at the posts of the jury, lawyers, witness and judge. Smith explains the technology is really a way to be organized and, "Being well organized is 50% to 75% of success on a case." Craven adds, "Our leverage with technology allows us to comfortably take on and frequently beat some of the largest firms."

The practice focus of Smith & Craven is based around business law, ranging from construction to entertainment and including administrative, commercial, corporate and transactional work. The areas they do not work in are family, criminal, bankruptcy, patent and estate planning, but Smith adds, "If we don't work in a particular area, bring me your problem anyway because we can usually point you in the direction of someone who does." Beyond their usual legal services, Smith and Craven offer educational seminars, whether it is to national associations or to small businesses.

A firm created by friends who have known each other since their first experiences in law, Smith & Craven is friendly as well as efficient and knowledgeable.

—Sarah Laidlaw

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