

PROFILE

Attorney was instrumental in forming DEQ

“You can have economic development and environmental protection. They’re not opposites.”

By JENNI JERAS
The Business Journal

James Derouin has mastered the art of compromise.

As an environmental attorney in Wisconsin, he negotiated 15 legislative bills in a 14-year time span on behalf of business interests. It was done despite the presence of about 140 active pro-environmental groups in the state.

For nine years, he was in negotiations with American Indian tribes and government authorities on groundwater issues in Wisconsin, a glaciated state with 14,000 lakes.

Here in Arizona, Derouin is the force leading the Hassayampa Steering Committee’s remediation of the Hassayampa Landfill, one of the many Superfund sites he has dealt with. That project involves 110 different parties, including government and private interests.

Superfund sites are those designated by the federal government for extensive environmental cleanup.

“I’d say Jim is probably one of the most talented environmental attorneys in the state,” says Ed Fox, director of the Arizona Department of Environmental Quality. “There are a group of senior attorneys around who sort of make up the first echelon. He is clearly among them.”

Derouin has been a lawyer with Meyer, Hendricks, Victor, Osborn & Maledon since 1987. But he’s never seen himself as an environmental attorney.

At the time the U.S. government was acquainting itself with environmental issues, Derouin was in the rural enclaves of Brazil as a Peace Corps volunteer.

“When I returned, the world had changed,” he says. “Woodstock had happened. Earth Day had happened. The whole environmental epic had begun.”

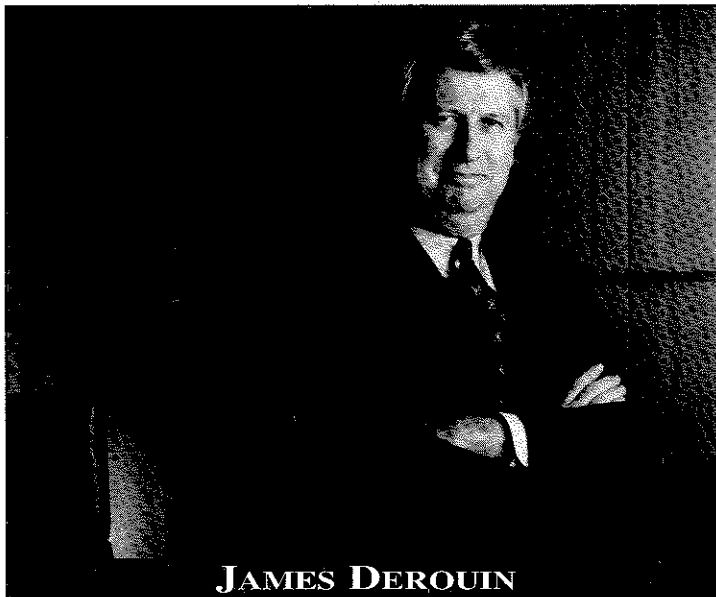
He went into the Peace Corps after earning his law degree from the University of Wisconsin because he wanted to learn a foreign language and live in a foreign culture. Bad eyesight prevented him from entering the military to achieve those goals.

“By the time I was out of high school, the only foreign country I had been to was Minneapolis,” he says. “I was high-strung and worn out.”

As a volunteer, he managed a rural electrification process in a tiny Brazilian town. Derouin says he was assigned that position because he knew how to organize and relate to government officials.

“It was truly an extraordinary experience. What you get out of it is personal growth,” he says. “I like to think I gave as much as I got.”

Derouin was experienced with government officials because he worked in the Wisconsin governor’s office during law school — a stint that allowed him to work with former Defense Secretary Dick Cheney, who then was also working in the governor’s office.



Mark Zernick

JAMES DEROUIN

Title.....partner Spouse.....Judy Age.....49
Firm Meyer, Hendricks Children.....2 daughters Home.....Scottsdale
Education.....J.D., University of Wisconsin
Associations..Phx. Env. Quality Comm., AZ Regulatory Review Council

It was when he returned to the United States in 1971 that Derouin began concentrating on environmental law. The clients he worked with at the governor’s office suddenly wanted his representation on environmental matters, he says.

Working in the governor’s office and volunteering with the Peace Corps prepared Derouin for the job, he says.

“I learned the two P’s: patience and persistence,” he says. “When dealing with regulators you have to be persistent, gracious, and you have to do your homework.”

Derouin was happy working in his home state of Wisconsin when, in 1975, he was struck with a leg disability that ultimately would require 10 operations.

It became necessary to relocate to a place where there would be no snow and no icy surfaces that could be dangerous for him.

With his wife, Judy, and two daughters, he moved to Arizona in 1985. In 1986, he was involved in writing the Arizona Environmental Quality Act, which created the DEQ.

It was during that time that Derouin says he noticed the Environmental Protection Agency’s interest in Arizona.

“They started to take notice of the state as there was a migration of people,” he says. “There was a new awareness of environmental conditions. It was changing from a mining/agricultural state to a cosmopolitan one.”

He describes that time as one of environmental protection and awareness, highlighted by the creation of the Superfund project.

Derouin has worked personally on Superfund sites in Texas and California and throughout Arizona.

The Hassayampa Landfill project is the largest in the state, he says. Since 1987, almost \$10 million has been spent on the remediation process.

“The parties in this project are very cooperative,” he says. “Most businesses feel it’s better to spend money on remediation rather than legal challenges.”

The success of the remediation, including installation of the groundwater remedy, could be attributed to Derouin’s knack for negotiation.

“He is uniquely talented at bringing people together to reach mutually beneficial solutions to problems,” says Barbara Goldberg, a Scottsdale assistant city attorney.

She says Derouin knows how to get along with people.

“He is very effective at working with adversaries, and he’s enjoyable to work with,” Goldberg says.

Derouin says the state is in pretty good environmental shape, having little heavy manufacturing activity other than mining.

The real problem is the 44 landfills in the bed of the Salt River.

“That’s one thing you learn as an environmental attorney: We get smarter as we go along,” he says.

To keep the state’s environmental climate healthy, Derouin says, the Legislature has to make sure funds are allocated properly.

“It’s a grave mistake to underfund an environmental agency and force it to make slow or bad decisions,” he says.

The tension between government regulators and business is one that is easily solved, he says. Corporations just want fast quality review of their applications.

“It takes bright, committed people on both sides,” Derouin says. “You can have economic development and environmental protection. They’re not opposites.”

He says he is very pleased with his career.

It’s really no surprise, he says, that someone who grew up with a love of nature, fishing in backwoods logging country, would turn out to be an environmental attorney.

He is proud that a kid whose father was a high-school football coach, never making more than \$12,500 a year, later would be invited to speak at engagements that included President Carter at Harvard’s John F. Kennedy School of Government.

“I’ve had a wonderful career,” Derouin says. “I think it’s pretty good for someone who never had two nickels to rub together and inherited nothing but work ethics from his parents.

“I’ve made a difference by advising people on go and no-go decisions,” he says. “Life is fortuitous; you have to be opportunistic.”