



Photo by Robert Chase

His basic desire to be an “excellent lawyer” eventually propelled Steven Sallen to the presidency of Maddin Hauser, a firm located in the Essex Centre in Southfield.

## From law clerk to CEO

*Attorney enjoys distinguished career with Metro area firm*

BY SHEILA PURSGLOVE  
*Legal News*

Steven Sallen owes a successful legal career to a 3-by-5 index card tacked to a bulletin board, advertising a law clerk position at Maddin, Hauser, Wartell, Roth & Heller, P.C.

“I didn’t know about Maddin Hauser at the time, but I needed a job. That 3-by-5 card changed my life,” he says.

That’s some understatement.

Sallen, who started clerking for Maddin Hauser in 1983, is now president and chief executive officer of the firm, presiding member of its Executive Management Committee, and head of the environmental law practice group. His clients include some of Michigan’s most successful manufacturing firms, real estate developers, general contractors and commercial real estate brokers. He was named a Top Lawyer by Detroit’s *dBusiness* magazine in 2010, a Michigan Super Lawyer, and for both 2010 and 2011 was named one of The Best Lawyers In America by Best Lawyers, in the field of real estate law.

Answering the ad was one of two “Super Lucky Days” in his life, he says — the other was the day he met his wife.

Sallen, a metro Detroit native and graduate of Cranbrook High School, received his bachelor’s degree from the University of Michigan. He then earned his law degree, cum laude, from the University of Detroit School of Law, where he served as Case and Comment Editor of the *University of Detroit Law Review*.

“I was nudged toward law by my older brother, who was doing my father’s bidding at the time — sending a message that would be received,” he says. “Bottom line, my dad wanted me to be able to work for myself, to be fully in charge of my own future. My dad knew that a career in law would, at least, afford me the opportunity to work for myself one day.

“I realized in my 30s, about 10 years after I graduated from law school, just how much I appreciated what my dad and brother did for me. Later in my career,

as I began to develop my own book of business, it became more apparent why they pushed me in that direction.

“My father passed away about two weeks after I got my first law school admissions letter. I never got a chance to discuss my career with him, but he did know that I got into law school. I like to think that he knows how I’m doing, and that he would be proud.”

Landing in the niches of real estate law and environmental law was pure luck, he says.

“I was hired out of law school by Maddin Hauser which, at that time, was a boutique real estate firm. Michigan was in a terrible slump — sound familiar? I was just happy to have a job. I learned real estate because it was what they did here at the time.

“Then, right around 1986 or ‘87 — right after the Superfund law was reauthorized and funded by Congress — one of the lawyers at the firm had family business, and they had an environmental law problem. He asked me to study the law and to help him handle the case.

“I really do like both areas of the law; there’s a natural synergy to real estate and environmental law. I was able to develop an expertise and become an important resource for our firm.”

As for his progression from law clerk to CEO, “It sure goes by quick,” he says.

“I just came to work every day and did a good job, trying to advance my clients interests and grow my career at the same time. I never felt as though I was climbing some sort of ‘corporate ladder.’ Things just took on a natural progression — after I started as a clerk, I was hired as an associate, then I was offered partnership, later I was appointed to the executive committee and then president and CEO. I wasn’t actively thinking about pursuing that position. My ambition has always just been to be an excellent lawyer. Everything else just fell into place.”

Sallen is editor and regular contributor to *Real e-State*, an electronic newsletter for real estate professionals, published quarterly by the Maddin Hauser real estate law practice group. He is also the creator and

owner of an instructional program for commercial real estate brokers titled *Commission-Safe®*, which publishes periodic training materials and business broker tools.

His many published articles include: “From Lemons to Lemonade; Successful Management of Lease Termination Negotiations Can Lead to New Opportunities for Commercial Property Owners,” and “New IRS Rules for Lenders May Help Troubled Commercial Borrowers.”

Sallen’s leisure time is devoted to his wife and three children: his oldest is a Teach for America corps member in Denver, another is a junior in college, and his youngest is a junior in high school.

“My wife says I should have more hobbies but I’ve been too busy with the family — coaching girls’ softball and following my son as he played baseball all over the Midwest. I was always a very involved dad.”

Sallen also enjoys taking walks with his wife and two dogs — both rescue mutts — and paddling his new canoe. He learned to paddle a canoe at Camp Arowhon in Algonquin Park in Ontario when he was 10 years old, and says “paddling is therapeutic.”

A resident of Orchard Lake Village, Sallen loves the Motor City and surrounding areas.

“It’s funny, this area takes such a beating in the national media, but it really is a great place to raise a family,” he says.

“I live in a beautiful home in a beautiful area. I don’t have bad traffic to or from work, there’s no smog, no earthquakes, forest fires or hurricanes. We try to enjoy all four seasons. My home backs up to the West Bloomfield Nature Trail. I feel like I’m up north when I’m in my own backyard.

“I’ve been blessed with a wonderful family, and to be associated with an excellent law firm. I learned my craft from people who deeply cared about practicing the right way, the ethical way. For someone to be successful, they need a lot of ambition and drive, of course, but it’s a whole lot easier when the people in your life are people who you are proud to call family, friends, partners.”