

Podhurst Orseck's Joel Perwin leaving to start his own firm

by **Laurie Cunningham**

After 23 years with Podhurst Orseck in Miami, prominent appellate lawyer Joel Perwin has decided to leave the influential law firm and start his own practice.

Perwin, 55, who has argued dozens of high stakes cases before the Florida Supreme Court, announced he was leaving at the firm's annual retreat at the Four Seasons Hotel in Boca Raton last weekend. He said he's departing to focus solely on appellate work.

"I've been thinking about it for awhile and just decided it was something I wanted to do," he said in an interview. "At my age, I knew if I didn't do it now I was never going to."

As a member of Podhurst Orseck, a 12-lawyer plaintiff firm that has traditionally represented clients in personal injury, product liability and commercial litigation, Perwin's workload included helping the in-house teams who were preparing the law firm's bigger cases for trial. Although Perwin said he enjoyed the challenge, it forced him to limit the number of appellate cases he could accept.

"Going out on my own will give me the opportunity to take more cases that come in from other lawyers," Perwin said. "I think you just reach a point when you want to manage things your own way."

Perwin plans to rent an office in downtown Miami, but has not yet signed a lease. He will continue working for Podhurst Orseck until he gets his new practice set up, which he estimates will take two months. At this point, he has no plans to bring other attorneys or staffers along with him.

The reaction from his partners and support staff to his departure has been warm and tearful, Perwin said. The co-founder of the firm, Aaron Podhurst, assured Perwin he would always be a part of the family.

"Joel's been a great friend," Podhurst said. "We've had a great 20



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years together and now he wants to do his own thing, which he's entitled to. We miss him already."

After graduating from Harvard Law School in 1974, Perwin, a native of Miami, worked as a speechwriter for Vice President Walter Mondale and served as counsel to the U.S. Senate Judiciary Committee under Sen. Edward Kennedy, D-Mass. When Kennedy ran for president in 1980, Perwin became a member of his campaign staff.

In 1981, Perwin and his wife, Jean, decided they wanted to move back to Miami to raise their family. Perwin called attorney Walter Beckham Jr. of Podhurst Orseck, the father of his best friend from grade school, who had been his mentor since childhood.

Beckham, who was of counsel at Podhurst Orseck at the time, told him to get on the next plane. "It was pure luck that the firm had just decided they wanted to bring in another appellate lawyer," Perwin recalled.

Perwin has been with the boutique firm ever since, arguing appeals on behalf of plaintiffs in personal injury and product liability cases against big companies such as DuPont and Phillip Morris. ♦

Laurie Cunningham can be reached at lcunningham@floridabiz.com or at (305) 347-6648.