

# DENVER BUSINESS JOURNAL

## IN DEPTH: BEST OF THE BAR

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### Antitrust Law

## Hill believes in giving a voice to those often not heard

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Denver Business Journal

It's been a full 59 years of living, but Robert Hill, founding law partner of Denver-based Hill & Robbins, isn't thinking of retirement. He's having too much fun.

"I love doing my work. I'm one of those lucky guys that gets to work at something you care personally about," said Hill, winner in the antitrust category of the Denver Business Journal/ccintellect Best of the Bar survey.

The Hill & Robbins firm has done some heavyweight litigation, especially for a 10-lawyer firm. For instance, it represents plaintiffs in the Cooper vs. IBM pension case, which was filed in 1999 and has received national publicity and a favorable Illinois ruling for the plaintiffs last July. Damages haven't been determined, and IBM will appeal. The lawsuit alleges IBM's changes in pension benefit accruals hurt more than 200,000 older beneficiaries.

The IBM case is "a chance to give voice to people who otherwise wouldn't have a voice," Hill said.

The firm also represented shareholders of former Longmont disk-drive maker MiniScribe in winning a \$128 million settlement, including a huge award from accounting firm Coopers and Lybrand.

There have been other legal high points in Hill's career, but when asked about the highlights of his life, his mind first turns to the nonprofit arena.

At the top of his list, there's the 1996 co-founding of Denver-based Invest In Kids, a group that identifies the best children's programs in the nation and brings them to Colorado.

"Without any question, Invest in Kids is one of the highlights of my life," he said. It has brought to Colorado the Nurse Family Partnership, which helps at-risk pregnant women and their children, and the Incredible Years program, which helps reduce early school behavioral problems.

Jennifer Adler, executive director of Invest in Kids, said Hill is "an incredible critical thinker" who has co-chaired the nonprofit's board for the last five years and "added a tremendous amount on the political side."

Hill was influential in getting the Nurse Home Visitation Act passed by the state Legislature in 2000, which will provide \$300 million in funding, from tobacco settlement funds, over 20 years to the Nurse Family Partnership, she said.

Hill is "incredibly good" at taking the emotion out of a politically charged issue and reaching a well-reasoned decision, Adler said.

Hill said he has specifically picked areas where other volunteers weren't lining up, such as assuming the chairman post at the Ocean Journey aquarium when it closed, and helping to arrange for its eventual sale.

Why devote time to such causes? "That's real easy. I've been so blessed in my life. I think you've just got to give something back to the community," he said.

The communities where Hill grew up were quite small: Gravity, Iowa, population 150, and Bedford, Iowa, population 1,500, where he graduated with a high school class of about 70.

Hill first thought about becoming a lawyer in sixth grade when he swept law offices before school and on Saturdays. His father ran a title company owned by the lawyers, and lawyers were generally well-regarded in the community.

Among his other jobs through high school, college and law school were: throwing bales of hay into trailers; sacking groceries; playing drums in a rock 'n' roll band that he formed; lifeguarding at a lake; loading trucks; digging ditches; and shoveling coke in the steel mills in Gary, Ind., where the dust was so thick he couldn't see his feet.

Those jobs helped build a work ethic that continues today. Hill still works at least 60 hours a week.

He attended St. Olaf College in Northfield, Minn., for two years, becoming sophomore class president and getting so swallowed up in extracurricular activities that his grades suffered. So he transferred to the University of Nebraska to escape extracurricular pressures and "lived in the library for the next two years," he said. During college, the Vietnam War and civil rights movement drew him even more to the law as a way to make a difference in society.

His grades shot up at Nebraska, and he was accepted to the University of Colorado Law School, a choice that stretched back to his fondness of trips to Colorado as a boy to improve his asthma symptoms.

Hill loved law school, graduated first in his class, clerked for a year for a federal judge in Los Angeles, and then worked in Washington, D.C., for the firm of Covington & Burling. At Covington, he gained antitrust law experience defending the National Football League.

The firm granted him one six-month leave to work for legal services -- where a landlord once pulled a knife on him -- and a later leave to teach antitrust and civil procedure courses at CU Law School in 1974-75.

Hill left Covington for good when he was asked to start an antitrust unit within the Colorado Attorney General's office. He headed that for three years and started his law firm in 1978. It stresses antitrust, securities and pension areas of litigation, and much of the work is on a class-action basis.

Hill has three daughters, three grandchildren and a second marriage of 15 years. He said he is very fortunate that his daughters turned out so well because he didn't spend as much time as he would have liked with them growing up.

"I think I got really lucky," he said.

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