

# DENVER BUSINESS JOURNAL

## IN DEPTH: PHILANTHROPY

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### Business with a cause

Attorney Hill is tops in Colorado volunteer work

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Special to the Business Journal

Robert Hill could have chosen a life of fame and fortune. He graduated first in his law class at the University of Colorado and was chosen for a clerkship for a Los Angeles federal court judge. Big-time cases crowded the docket in 1970, involving everyone from the Black Panthers to U.S. Attorney General John Mitchell to basketball superstar Spencer Haywood. Although the California court scene was exciting, Washington, D.C.'s, powerful siren song lured Hill to one of the most highly regarded law firms in the country, Covington and Burling.

"It was the largest law firm in Washington and the NFL was our big client at the time," he said. From the outset, Hill was challenged with complex legal cases. The work was everything he hoped for. Well, almost.

"When I was young, I was really poor. I lived with my grandparents until I was 4 years old and I was very fortunate that the teachers in my small town took a great interest in me," Hill said. "In other situations and other countries, I would not have had the opportunity to go to college and to law school. I've always been painfully aware that I couldn't do it alone and so I've always felt an obligation to give something in return."

Utilizing his professional talents primarily in the arena of corporate America, he decided, would not satisfy his deepest longings.

"Even though I have worked for many wonderful Fortune 500 clients, I didn't want to say at age 65 that I had helped the rich get richer," Hill said. "I knew I had to do cases that philosophically would make a difference."

With the impact of the Civil Rights movement and the Vietnam War also weighing heavily on his mind, Hill left Washington in 1974 to teach law classes at his alma mater and to create an antitrust division in the Colorado Attorney General's office. Four years later, Hill and partner David Robbins opened a law firm, which today still focuses on antitrust cases, pension fraud and water law.

More importantly, Hill has spent nearly 30 years participating in community service and pro bono cases that he believes have really made a difference. For that reason, Hill was selected as the 2003 National Philanthropy Day's Outstanding Volunteer award for his work on behalf of thousands of women, children and minorities. Many of Hill's public service activities have evolved from the Colorado Lawyers Committee, which he began 25 years ago. Today, the nonprofit advocacy group includes 40 law firms and 1,200 attorneys, who donate legal representation to those unable to afford it.

"This group has generated more free legal services than any other around the state," Hill said.

During the committee's early years, Hill co-chaired the legislative task force, which helped pass laws increasing childhood immunizations and requiring paternity testing. In the early 1980s, Hill became an advocate for women victimized by domestic violence and is responsible for helping draft a policy that requires Denver police to make arrests in domestic violence cases and videotape victim's statements immediately following the incident.

"It's not perfect but the difference is like night and day," he said.

Colorado for the past 20 years. Today, much of his energy is directed toward Invest in Kids, an organization he co-founded in 1996 to provide early intervention programs for at-risk children and families.

"The idea behind Invest in Kids is to look around the country at a variety of programs and determine which ones have documented long-term proven success," he said.

Nurse Family Partnerships was selected as the first pilot program. Now operating in 49 counties, NFP matches first-time mothers with a trained nurse for weekly meetings throughout pregnancy and until the baby turns 2 years old. The mentoring relationship helps improve health, nutrition and parenting skills, and provides mothers with information about education and career skills. A second program -- the Incredible Years -- is designed to identify behavioral problems in selected classrooms and to alleviate them through unobtrusive, yet effective, methods.

"Perhaps the thing that I'm most proud of is that this is not a Republican or Democratic [program]. It's a good investment for the state that will save money in the long run," said Hill.

Volunteer work, he also notes, is a good investment in one's own career.

"This is the best thing I have done for my career. It brings out the best in people, and the rewards greatly exceed the cost," he said.

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