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Call it happenstance, if you will.

Three Wisconsin attorneys with highly focused practices didn't set out as new lawyers to end up doing what they're doing. They carved out practices in gas explosion, nursing home abuse and medical device litigation.

But, once they realized the opportunities their career directions would yield, they leapt upon their niche practices with a passion. They now stand out as go-to lawyers in their fields.



WLU PHOTOS/COREY HENGEN

**Allen C. Schlinsog Jr.,
Reinhart Boerner
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The turning point in Allen C. Schlinsog Jr.'s career came in the mid-1990s, when he and attorney Ralph Weber were hired by SmartHealth Inc. to represent the Phoenix-based business in litigation in Wisconsin regarding health-care workers alleging they'd developed allergies as a result of wearing SmartHealth's latex gloves.

SmartHealth wasn't just satisfied with the results they achieved. The company proceeded to hire Schlinsog and Weber to lead its latex-glove litigation in dozens of similar lawsuits across the country.

It was then that Schlinsog realized he could make "drug and device" work the mainstay of his practice, when he was just five years out of law school.

"It started out as a happy accident, but then I fostered it," Schlinsog says.

"I knew I liked the work. It's challenging; it's always something new and different; it's scientific and technical. And there are always

issues that you don't see in the standard products liability case, such as causation. That's the most interesting part for me: You don't always really know. Sometimes the science just doesn't prove out a plaintiff's claim. Still, the plaintiff says, and I'm sometimes persuaded by, if not my theory, what? What caused this? Maybe the science just hasn't caught up yet. It's really fascinating work."

Schlinsog began seeking out and getting referrals from satisfied clients like SmartHealth, which remains a client today. He additionally joined the Defense Research Institute's Drug and Medical Device Section, asking for referrals from other attorneys.

Initially some clients were hesitant to hire "national counsel," believing it might be more cost-effective to have separate, local attorneys for each and every case. The opposite is true, says Schlinsog, explaining that there's more uniformity in strategy and less re-creating the wheel. Also, the client doesn't have to pay for the lawyer's learning curve regarding its products and business. And, Milwaukee firm rates are probably much better than most big-city firms of the same caliber.

"The most appealing thing about our practice is the trust factor. We've built close relationships with our clients," says Schlinsog. "I think I'm more invested in an outcome, knowing my clients and their products as well as I do, and knowing that not only am I planning upon seeing them again, but also, that I plan to be their attorney well into the future."

His practice has expanded into the role of advisor as well as litigator, counseling clients on how to prevent accidents and legal issues, and how to work with the Food and Drug Administration, for example.

Schlinsog says he is lucky to have been in the right place at the right time, and getting into a niche practice when specialization within law firms was just starting as a trend about a decade ago.

He believes it will continue. It's important to him when he's looking at hiring local counsel, and he can only assume that it matters a great deal to non-lawyers hiring lawyers as well. As a reflection of this trend, Schlinsog notes that at his firm, they've split the litigation team into subspecialties.