

BY JESSICA McCANN

Ever wonder what cows eat? **Lonnie Williams Jr.** knows. Want to see how a heart and lung machine works? Give Williams a call. And how, exactly, does electricity get from the power plant to your hair dryer? He could tell you that, too.

As a practicing attorney and partner at Snell & Wilmer in Phoenix, Williams learns about all sorts of things completely unrelated to the field of law. It's one of the reasons he loves his job.

want to learn, but you do," he laughs, adding that it was months before he could drink milk again after that case.

Williams earned his undergraduate degree from the University of Arizona with highest distinction in 1976, and then went on to Yale Law School to graduate in 1979. He accepted a position with Snell & Wilmer and was named a partner five years later. This made Williams the first African American to become a partner in a major Phoenix law firm. Nearly a decade later, he

are still areas—whether they be business, civic or social—that we're still doing 'the first.' We should be past that."

So, rather than setting his sights on being first, Williams simply throws himself into his work. And his enthusiasm is evident. You see it in his eyes and body language and hear it in his voice. He speaks of his work with a sincerity that only comes from truly loving what you do.

"I would absolutely love it if my kids went into law someday," he beams, as his children's portraits smile back at him from their prominent position on his office walls. "I think it's a highly noble profession."

Williams' practice focused on medical malpractice law initially but has since expanded to include a wide range of civil litigation in commercial business and real estate. He has extensive trial experience representing clients in employment, commercial, tort, banking and condemnation/eminent domain disputes.

From the pleasure that comes with learning new things to the thrill of outmaneuvering an opponent, Williams thoroughly enjoys trying cases. But he also considers the skill set it takes to win those cases absolutely critical to one's effectiveness as a lawyer.

"To effectively represent your client, the other side needs to know that, if necessary, you have the ability and the skill to take your case to a group of people you've never met—and you don't know what they do, you don't know what their prejudices are, you don't know what their beliefs are—and convince them that what you are saying is more probably true than what the other side is saying," says Williams. "That is the ultimate challenge." ▀

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"Over the course of time," says Williams, "I've had the benefit of learning a tremendous amount about a lot of different industries, and it's fascinating. It never gets boring, because there is an aspect of learning to everything I do. It's easier sometimes to learn the law than it is to learn what the deal is with your client's particular issues."

"For example, I did a case years ago regarding a byproduct of the cotton seed that cows eat, that actually can condemn the milk. So I learned what cows eat. ... Of course, some things you don't necessarily

became the first African American to be elected president of the Maricopa County Bar Association.

"Those were real positives in my life, going back 10 to 15 years, because they were goals in a career path. And there hadn't been any other African Americans in those positions, so if I was going to reach those goals, I had to be the first," says Williams. "I have to admit, my answer would probably be different today if I was going to be the 'first' at something. It would be positive in the sense that it's over, but negative in the sense that there

