



Memory Book Update

John Loukidelis

Agro Zaffiro — A Short History

Agro Zaffiro is a Hamilton law firm with a rich history of dedicated service to its clients and the community. The firm was founded in the mid-50s by John Agro. John, born in Hamilton in 1919, was the son of Italian immigrants. He served as a lieutenant with the Canadian forces in France during the Second World War. He attended St Michael's College at the University of Toronto and obtained his BA there. He then went to Osgoode and was called to the Bar in 1949.

By the mid-50s, John's practice was already busy enough that he decided to hire a law student, Nicholas Zaffiro. John determined that he would specialize in litigation matters, including criminal law. He encouraged Nicholas

to take on the firm's solicitors' work. Nick was 25 when he joined John's firm; only two years later Nick became John's partner in the practice of law when Agro, Cooper, Zaffiro was formed.

One of John's former students, Roger Yachetti, remembers John as a lawyer of "great integrity in the practice of law, fearless in protection of his client's interests. He would not yield easily — if at all — and he stood up to judges and opposing counsel. If John Agro turned up on the other side, you knew you were in for a tough fight". It was no wonder, then, that only ten years after being called to the Bar, John became a Queen's Counsel, the first lawyer of Italian descent to achieve such a distinction. In 1983, John was elected a Bencher of the Law Society of Upper Canada.

Nicholas Zaffiro, another Hamilton native of Italian descent, was born in 1930. He received his BA from McMaster, his law degree from Osgoode and his call to the Bar in 1955. Nick served as a mentor for many other successful lawyers, and, in recognition of his hard work as a lawyer, he became a QC in 1969.

Both John and Nick were very active in the Hamilton community. For example, John became the Chairman of the Hamilton Harbour Commission in 1976 and Hamilton's Italian-Canadian Citizen of the Year in 1984. Nick, meanwhile, was active with The Sons of Italy. He served as the Hamilton Lodge President in 1958 -1959 and as the Provincial President from 1961 to 1965. In 1967, Nick was recognized for his work in the community with the Canadian Centennial Medal and the Hamilton Italian Canadian Citizen of the Year award. In 1977, he received a Queen's Silver Jubilee Medal.

A number of other distinguished lawyers joined Agro Zaffiro in the years that followed. John Parente articulated with the firm and joined it upon his call to the Bar in 1957. John specialized in land development law. He also served as a President of the Sons of Italy and became a QC in 1978. Ed Orzel and William Hubar joined the firm as litigators upon their calls to the Bar in 1959 and 1964 respectively.

Lawyers who articulated at the firm or worked there as young lawyers remember a close-knit group of lawyers who supported each other and enjoyed spending time together socially. (Significantly, the firm's partners did not sign a partnership agreement until December, 1980.) They also remember a work environment where the young lawyers were expected to stand on their own two feet early and often. They remember the process as nerve-racking at times but ultimately rewarding: the lawyers learned a lot and

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gained valuable experience in a very short period of time.

In the early 90s, the firm went through a changing of the guard. John Agro retired in 1992, and, soon after he left, a number of other litigators followed. A new generation stepped up: Francis DeSantis and Michael Baker assumed leadership roles in the firm along with Ian Newcombe, Dale Parayeski, Charles Criminisi, Jane Milanetti (the firm's first female partner and now a judge of the Superior Court), Vanda Santini, David Elliot, Peter Volaric, Kathryn McKague and Jeffrey Naganobu. (Frank DeSantis had joined the firm in 1976 after a job interview with John Agro that consisted of one question: "I've picked a lot of juries in my day, and I think you're going to make a good lawyer. Do you want a job?")

The firm has continued to grow its practice through the years to encompass almost all areas of the law. 26 lawyers now work at the firm, and it occupies three floors at One James Street South in downtown Hamilton. The firm's lawyers and staff continue to contribute to the community on a volunteer basis. The list of boards and other volunteer activities undertaken by members of the firm spans the better part of a page.

Agro Zaffiro, while it looks to the future as it changes and grows, maintains a keen sense of its own history. It takes pride in that history and draws inspiration from it. In fact, the firm thought it so important to preserve that history that it hired a co-op student in part to compile and write a firm history. Hopefully, other firms in Hamilton will emulate Agro Zaffiro's example in this regard. ■

John Loukidelis is a lawyer at Loukidelis Professional Corporation where he restricts his practice to tax law. John can be reached at john@jltax.ca

The Hamilton Law Association presents...

Thursday, December 1st, 2016

The Hamilton Convention Centre

8:00 am—3:30 pm



The 16th Annual Advocacy Conference

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Topics

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Associates - Lawyers

● **Threshold Update**

Presented by: **Bevin Shores**, Hughes Amys LLP

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Presented by: **Andrew Keesmaat**, Agro Zaffiro LLP

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