

*Back due to popular demand. The 2015 series begins with an interview which features members of the Menor Family, although The late Honorable Benjamin Menor (Bar No. 847), Associate Justice of the Supreme Court of the State of Hawaii, passed away in 1986, in this year of honoring our attorneys with three digit Bar numbers, we wanted to take this month to recognize the Menor Family. Justice Benjamin Menor devoted his life to public service and influenced his entire family with his passion to serve others.*

**Ron Menor**, attorney and councilman for District 9, son of the late Justice Benjamin Menor and the late Barney Menor's (Justice Menor's younger brother) daughters: **Sherry Menor-McNamara**, President and CEO of the Chamber of Commerce of Hawaii, and **Elsa F. Menor McGehee**, partner at Hartley & McGehee, LLP.

**Benjamin Menor** was a true pioneer for Asian Americans. When Menor was young, most children of Filipino ancestry did not study beyond the ninth grade. They were expected to leave school to work in the plantations to assist their families financially. Menor's mother however, pushed Menor to stay in school and he graduated from Hilo High School in 1941 as salutatorian of his class of 517 students.

Shortly after high school, World War II broke out and Menor was drafted into the United States Army. This allowed the energetic individual to gain American citizenship, and in 1946, when he was discharged after serving in the Philippines as part of the First Filipino Regiment, Menor took advantage of the GI Bill and attended the University of Hawaii. Menor studied hard in university and excelled on the debate team. After graduating from the University of Hawaii in 1952, he went on to study law at Boston University.

After law school, Menor returned to Hawaii and set up a successful law practice. In 1962, Menor was elected to the State Senate as a Democrat. A few years later, in 1968, he was appointed to the Circuit Court as a judge, thereafter in 1974 he was appointed to the Supreme Court of the State of Hawaii. He was the first person of Filipino ancestry to become a Justice of a State Supreme Court in the United States.

Menor retired from the bench in 1983 and passed away in 1986. Throughout his career, he was always active in the Filipino community as a positive role model for Filipino Americans.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Cordova, Dorothy. Benjamin Menor. In Kim, Hyung-chan (Ed.), *Distinguished Asian Americans: A Biographical Dictionary* (pp. 239–240). Retrieved from [https://books.google.com/books?id=prhRI6DYXRMc&pg=PA239&lpg=PA239&dq=benjamin+menor&source=bl&ots=E02FogB3u-&sig=UP7YnSu-ajTjGh-mWpzsTe\\_Pkt4&hl=en&sa=X&ei=rtbFVLD7KMSzoQSlvIH4CQ&ved=0CC4Q6AEwAw#v=onepage&q=benjamin%20menor&f=false](https://books.google.com/books?id=prhRI6DYXRMc&pg=PA239&lpg=PA239&dq=benjamin+menor&source=bl&ots=E02FogB3u-&sig=UP7YnSu-ajTjGh-mWpzsTe_Pkt4&hl=en&sa=X&ei=rtbFVLD7KMSzoQSlvIH4CQ&ved=0CC4Q6AEwAw#v=onepage&q=benjamin%20menor&f=false)



***RON MENOR** (Bar No. 2751) shares with us how his decision to pursue the law and become a public servant was influenced by his father Benjamin Menor.*

**Your father was true pioneer for Filipino Americans, how much of an impact did he have in your decision to pursue your current career of being an attorney and a politician?**

My father had a profound impact on my decision to enter public service and the legal profession. He was an ideal role model. Growing up, my recollection of my father was of his active involvement in the community. Before he became a State Senator and a judge, he volunteered his time in school parent-teacher organizations, youth sports and other community activities. The advice that he gave me about the importance of giving back to the community continues to resonate within me.

My father also decided to pursue a career in law because it allowed him to utilize his intellectual and analytical abilities as well as to provide for our family's needs. But more importantly, he viewed the legal profession as a means to promote social justice. This was an important consideration for him because while growing up on the plantations, he saw how plantation laborers were treated as second class citizens whose legal rights, which were few and far between, were often ignored and trampled upon. My decision to enter the legal profession was also motivated by my desire to make a difference in the lives of people.

**Your educational background is quite impressive; you went to Iolani, UCLA, and Georgetown. Your father's education opened up many doors for him. How do you think your education has influenced your life?**

I am grateful and fortunate for the educational opportunities that my parents provided for me. My father always emphasized the importance of education as a key to getting ahead in life. A good education enabled my father to rise from his humble beginnings on the plantations to a position of prominence in the community. In regards to my own career, pursuing my education gave me the knowledge and skills to not only practice law, but also make meaningful contributions to society as an elected official. As someone whose family has benefited from educational opportunities, I have always placed a high priority as a policy-maker on the importance of providing a quality education for our young people in Hawaii.

**Your father is remembered as being a positive role model for Filipino Americans in Hawaii, what sort of activities do you do now to help the Filipino American community? And what advice do you have for people considering a legal career?**

Over the years, I have worked on numerous projects and activities that have enhanced the well-being and status of the Filipino community as a whole. I was one of the founders and past Chair of the National Federation of Filipino American Associations (NaFFAA) Region XII which is a national advocacy organization that promotes the interests of Filipinos and Filipino-Americans throughout the United States. I have also supported the activities and projects of numerous other Filipino organizations including the United Filipino Council of Hawaii (UFCH), the Oahu Filipino Community Council (OFCC), and Sariling Gawa, an organization representing young Filipinos. Finally, I have often been invited as a guest speaker or panelist at various conferences and events to share my perspectives on issues and concerns affecting the Filipino community.

My advice to people considering a legal career is practical—Make sure that you are familiar with and willing to commit to the demands and requirements of a legal career, and don't get into law just to make money. Do it also because you have a genuine and sincere desire to serve the needs of others within our legal system.

*Now we turn our attention over to the family of the late Barney Menor, younger brother of the Justice Benjamin Menor, uncle to **Ron Menor** and father to **Sherry Menor-McNamara**, President and CEO of the Honolulu Chamber of Commerce, and **Elsa F. Menor McGehee**, partner at Hartley & McGehee, LLP.*

*Barney Menor, like his older brother Benjamin was a former state legislator and Hawaii County executive. A native of Pahoia on the Big Island where he grew up, he graduated from the University of Hawaii in 1953, and served in the Army from 1953 to 1955. In 1964, he was first elected to the State House for the Pauoa-Punchbowl district and served through 1970; he was vice speaker in his last term. In 1976 he was appointed by Hawaii County Mayor Herbert Matayoshi to be his deputy managing director and served as managing director under Mayor Megumi Kon. Menor was a member of the Chaminade University Board of Regents and served two terms as president of the Honolulu Filipino Chamber of Commerce. A real estate broker since 1959, he was retained by Puna Geothermal Venture on the Big Island as land manager and land consultant.*

*The younger brother of Benjamin Menor, the late state associate Supreme Court justice and former state senator.<sup>2</sup>*

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<sup>2</sup> Obituary, Honolulu Star Bulletin, Thursday, November 18, 1999.



***SHERRY MENOR-MCNAMARA**, President and CEO the Chamber of Commerce of Hawaii since 2013 shares with us how her career path was shaped by the values her family instilled in her.*

**You were born in Tokyo; raised in Hilo, where you graduated high school; moved to UCLA for college, and stayed in Los Angeles to pursue a Masters in Public Policy and Administration at USC; lived in New York and Tokyo. After all of your education and travel, what influenced you to return home to Hawaii and pursue even further education, your JD/MBA (not to forget your recent completion of the Executive Education Program through the Harvard University Kennedy School of Government).**

My mother was very insistent that her children attend college on the mainland and remain there to gain work experience, expand our network, learn about new cultures, and become more independent. After 10 years away from Hawaii, I felt that it was time to return home and see how I could make a positive difference in our state. Hawaii has afforded wonderful opportunities for my grandparents and my mother, who was born and raised in Japan and opened a small business in Hilo. Therefore, I felt compelled to give back.

Education has always been a priority of my parents and they preached that learning was a lifetime undertaking. Because the JD/MBA program only entailed one more year of school, I felt it was worth the investment. During this time, I worked at the State Legislature, as well as ESPN Sports. In hindsight, I'm not sure how I attended both programs and worked, but somehow I managed it. It is during this time that I found my true passion. I realized that I enjoyed and appreciated the policy-making process and wanted to work as an advocate. Upon graduation, a business advocacy position opened at the Chamber of Commerce Hawaii. On the professional side, I was drawn to this position because of the important role businesses play in a vibrant economy and, on the personal side, because my Mom is a small-business owner and I had an affinity for the challenges she and other small businesses face.

**You joined the Chamber of Commerce in 2006 in their Business Advocacy and Government Relations Department. How did completing a JD/MBA program assist you in your position, and how does it assist you in your current position as President and CEO?**

The JD/MBA program definitely helped me prepare for my first and present position at the Chamber. A legal education helped me analyze and understand the 2,000-plus bills that are introduced each legislative session. While I have many additional responsibilities as President and CEO, I continue to work with our Business Advocacy Department in reviewing bills, testifying at hearings, and advocating for our members at the State Capitol.

**You come from a family that has contributed a lot of time and effort to public service. How has your family influenced your career path?**

Since childhood, my parents always said to find a career where you can make the most difference. While my career path led me to a variety of jobs in entertainment, sports marketing, public relations, and government, the job I find the most gratifying is my current position as President and CEO of the Chamber of Commerce Hawaii. This position, while not a public-service position per se, provides me an opportunity to make a positive difference for our state through the policy-making process and other initiatives led by the Chamber.

The importance of public service was driven by my parents. My Father, Barney Menor, served in the House of Representatives and as Deputy Managing Director for former Mayor of Hawaii Island, the late Herbert Matayoshi. My Uncle Ben served in the State Senate and as the first Filipino in the nation to serve as an associate justice on a State Supreme Court. Also, my cousin Ron Menor served in the House of Representatives, State Senate, and currently on the City Council of Honolulu. My father's other siblings also spent their entire careers in public service.

Simply put, helping others and doing things for the greater good were, and continue to be, values that were instilled in me since I was a child.

**Is there anything that you would have done differently?/Do you have any advice for people contemplating careers in law or business?**

I always believe that "things happen for a reason." If I had done things differently, I wouldn't be where I am now. I love my job and wouldn't take back or trade it for anything in the world. Some find their passion immediately, while others find it later in life. For me, it was the latter and my education and experiences were the catalyst.

Since joining the Chamber nine years ago, I've enjoyed every moment. I work with a talented and energetic team, supportive membership and Board of Directors, and well-intentioned stakeholders including the Legislature. Collectively and collaboratively, we're striving to build a better business climate, thriving economy, and improved quality of life for the people of Hawaii.

If someone asked me whether they should pursue a career in law or business, I would tell them that the first step is to find a career that they are passionate about. Then, fuel that passion with the education and experiences that will allow their dreams to become a reality.



*ELSA F.M. MCGEHEE (Bar No. 7044), named partner of Hartley & McGehee, a boutique family law firm in Kailua, shares with us how her passion for serving others was cultivated by her family.*

**Your father Barney Menor was very active in politics. How has he influenced your decision to become an attorney?**

My father was a charismatic individual, eloquent speaker and effective leader who contributed much to the communities of Hawaii through his career in public service. Dad was a former state legislator serving the Pauoa-Punchbowl district from 1964 to 1970, served two terms as president of the Filipino Chamber of Commerce, and was a Hawaii county executive for several years. I think I was lucky enough to "inherit" some of his leadership qualities because I was very active in school politics from a young age. I graduated from high school as the Student Body President at Sacred Hearts Academy where I was fortunate enough to be surrounded by other strong women and leaders. After college, I always knew I wanted to use my speaking and writing skills to help people and the area of law seemed fitting. I remember my father jumping with joy after he found out that I was accepted into the U.H. William S. Richardson School of Law where I graduated in 1997. Although my father passed in 1999, I am so happy that he was able to attend my swearing-in at the Supreme Court. I am very grateful for the legacy he has left and I hope to emulate his work ethic and dedication to helping others in my career.

**While you were a student at the William S. Richardson School of Law, you helped to create the Filipino Law Students Association. What were some of the driving forces that made you want to create this student organization?**

I wanted to work with my fellow law school colleagues to help create a support system for Filipino law school students plus create opportunities for the students to get involved in the Filipino Community. To date, FLSA not only offers scholarships to law students and networking support to graduates, but also is active in community events like the annual Filipino Fiesta. Many of the colleagues who helped start the organization are very successful leaders and attorneys in their own right, in areas ranging from multi-ethnic issues, environmental law, labor law, family law, corporate law and public interest. I think there is a tremendous opportunity to also reach young Filipino grade school and high school students, especially those from more economically disadvantaged areas and immigrant families. The earlier we can reach out to these students, the faster they will realize just how much they can make a difference in their families and their communities by working hard in school, helping others, and establishing goals for their future.

**You are involved in numerous pro bono and volunteer activities, VLSH, Access to Justice, and fundraising for other programs, such as the Aloha United Way, and the Hawaii Food Bank. Where do you think your spirit of volunteerism came from?**

I think my spirit of volunteerism comes in large part from my mother, Florence Menor. My Mom was a single mother of 4 and had to rely on the assistance of many individuals from church, school, and the community to help her through some tough times. Even up until she passed away in 2010, Mom volunteered at St. Francis Hospital and also crocheted bonnets for newborns at Kapiolani Medical Center. While growing up, Mom would teach us to "give back" whether it be to bring treats to the Children's Hospital, volunteer at school functions and church activities, or just be helpful to a friend, relative or neighbor down the street. My mother would always say, "Charity starts at home," which meant that we should first take care of our family and people close to us. My mother taught us to really take care of each other. As the youngest in my family, I have benefitted from the care, protectiveness, love and guidance of my older siblings. We all can emulate that through the way we treat others and how we help others even if it's something simple like gathering up a box of canned goods for the Hawaii Food Bank. Every good deed, no matter how small or big, makes a difference.

**Is there anything that you would have done differently?/Do you have any advice for people contemplating the law?**

I don't think I would have done too much differently because I believe your life path and the twists and turns you take along the way, including good and bad experiences, make you stronger and wiser. I am very thankful for my mentors over the past 18 years of my legal career in which I have practiced personal injury, insurance defense, civil litigation and now family law. For people contemplating a career in law, I would get involved and/or work in a legal setting to see if that is what you like. I would also encourage those interested in the law to remember that you don't have to be an attorney to have a career in law. For example, if you want to help the youth of Hawaii, you could consider being a guardian ad litem, child custody evaluator, or a juvenile probation officer. I think the main thing is to determine why you want to practice law and seek out the job that allows you to accomplish your goal. When I graduated from law school, I knew I wanted to practice family law. In light of my own upbringing and having divorced parents, I feel I can connect with people going through this life challenge and to help steer them in the right direction when it comes to issues related to children. I feel incredibly blessed to have been practicing in this area for the past eight years now with my partner Steve Hartley at our firm Hartley & McGehee. In my practice, I know I can make a difference in people's lives.