



PRESS RELEASE
January 11, 2024

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For Release on Martin Luther King Day

UNITED STATES DISTRICT JUDGE ALVIN W. THOMPSON AWARDED CONNECTICUT DEMOCRACY CENTER'S COMMUNITY LEADER AWARD

Martin Luther King, Jr. once said, "Life's most persistent question is, 'What are you doing for others?'" With this question in mind, the Judges of the United States District Court for the District of Connecticut are happy to announce that on December 1, 2023, Alvin W. Thompson – their esteemed colleague and friend and the first African American federal judge in the District of Connecticut – received the Connecticut Democracy Center's ("CTDC") inaugural Community Leader Award. The CTDC will honor Judge Thompson and other business and philanthropic honorees with an inspirational program on February 1, 2024, at Connecticut's Old State House.

The CTDC's mission is to inspire people of all ages to engage in civic life and strengthen their communities. It offers civic education and programs that inform and develop the skills needed to be effective modern citizens and community partners. The CTDC established the Community Leader Award to recognize individuals committed to strengthening democracy through extraordinary acts of citizenship, public service, and community engagement.

Chief Judge Michael Shea remarked: "Judge Thompson's tireless efforts to promote civic education concerning our court system, the rule of law, and the Constitution, and to empower individuals to participate in our democratic society are worthy of recognition. I can think of no judge or lawyer in the State of Connecticut who better embodies the qualities the Connecticut Democracy Center attaches to the Community Leader Award."

Judge Thompson formed and is the chair of the District of Connecticut's Public Outreach Committee ("CTPOC"). He coordinates and inspires a team of federal judges, volunteer lawyers, and court staff to educate young people and the public about the vital role courts play in keeping our democracy healthy. Judge Thompson humanizes the justice system by visiting schools, appearing on discussion panels, and inviting people to attend naturalization ceremonies. He also helps organize the Warren W. Eginton Justice Institute, a week-long summer program that teaches high school students about civil and criminal litigation, culminating with a mock trial competition.

The CTPOC has worked in partnership with local attorneys, educators, and community groups to provide a broad range of learning opportunities at the Hartford, New Haven, and Bridgeport courthouses. Federal judges visit elementary schools to read civics-oriented children's books to students. Judges and attorneys teach interactive classes on a range of civics topics to middle and high school students. Career panels composed of judges, attorneys,

probation officers, and court staff discuss the diverse jobs available in the court system. Students can also participate in essay and art contests, mock hearings and trials, and much more.

Judge Thompson also co-chairs the ABA Business Law Section's Rule of Law Working Group whose mission is to help business lawyers better understand their role as custodians of the rule of law. In a column published in Business Law Today, Judge Thompson wrote: "The beneficial effects of civic education are not only desirable but necessary for our well-being as a nation. Consequently, as members of the legal profession, we should engage in and promote civic education that will support and strengthen the Rule of Law. Doing so is one of the ways we can deliver on the solemn promise we made when we took an oath to support and defend the Constitution and laws of the United States of America."

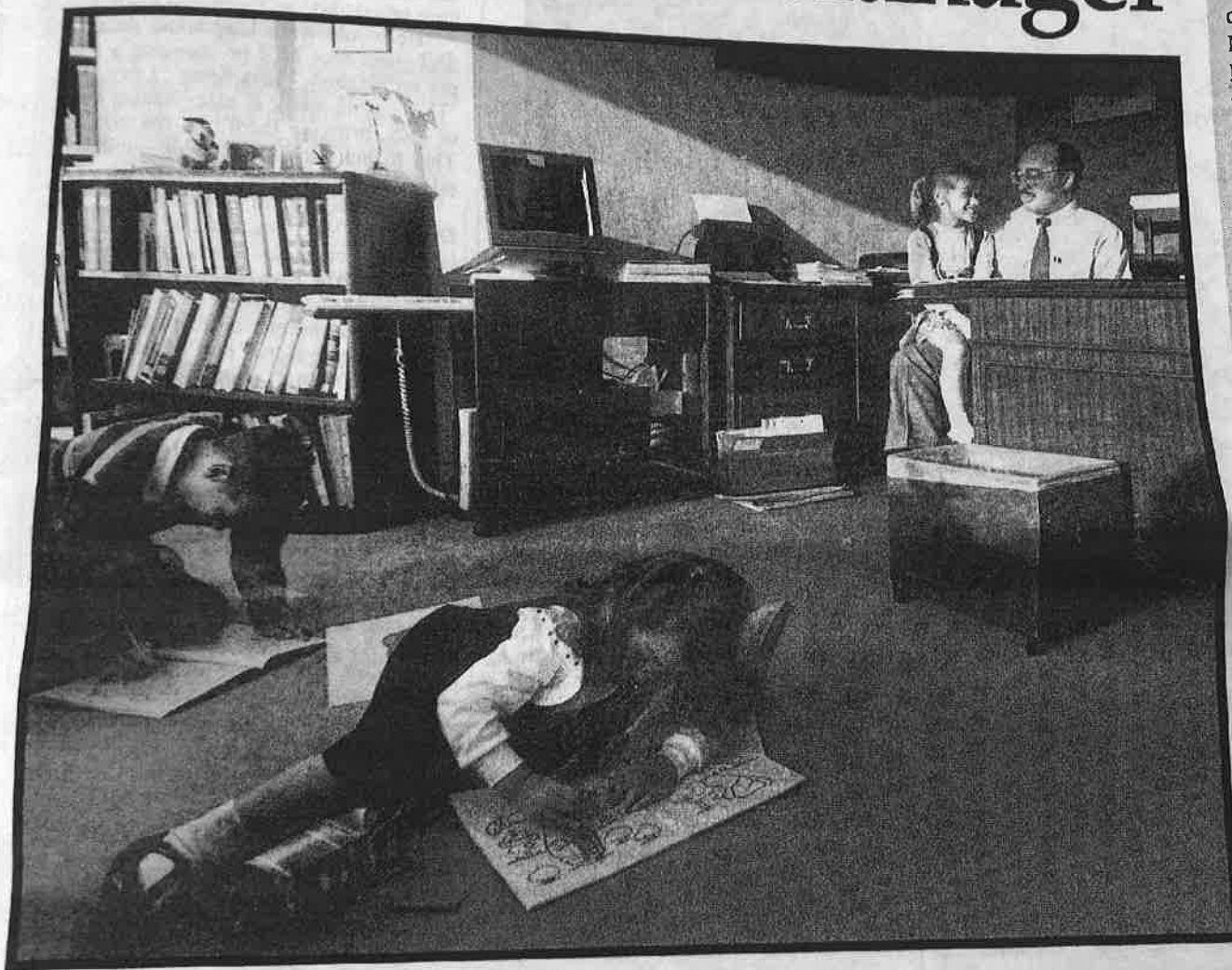
Judge Thompson received his B.A. from Princeton University in 1975 and his J.D. from Yale Law School in 1978. Upon graduation, he worked as an attorney with Robinson & Cole in Hartford. In 1991, he was elected managing partner and became the first African American managing partner in the history of Connecticut's major law firms. In 1994, he was appointed to the federal bench. He served as chief judge from 2009 to 2013. Judge Thompson's commitment to community service and philanthropic activities spans over forty years and includes a myriad of organizations and community endeavors. His impact as a community leader and champion of democratic values spans decades in both the private and public sectors.

For more information about the CTDC awards and to purchase event tickets, please visit <https://ctdemocracycenter.org/ctdc-awards/>. For more information about the CTPOC's programs and to register for their events, please visit <https://www.ctd.uscourts.gov/public-outreach>.

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[Supporting articles attached below]

Robinson & Cole's Wunderkind Manager



Alvin Thompson has demonstrated he is comfortable with himself and others – as evidenced by his willingness to bring his children into the office and even change diapers on his desk – and that has quickly made him a leader at the state's second-largest firm. Now, Thompson has ascended to the peak, becoming Robinson & Cole's managing partner at the age of 38.

See story on Page 2.

CTLA Is Tacky Le

BY JOSEPH

SUSAN CAROCAR hospital for about a year. I heard from a friend that I'm concerned you why."

"I just learned about the accident on Route 1 on November 14, 1991," said the Hartford-based person who bills himself as a Motorcycle Attorney. "I'm concerned you why."

Haymond's letter to the convalescing solicitor was a personal injury. "I've helped many accidents recover and I understand going through... can help."

Carocari, who has a neck and heard of Haymond's solicitor's disgust.

"It never occurred to him," she says. "I'm superficial. To me, that definition of much was going on was not my firm."

Solicitation is a concern, however, powerful Connecticut Association of Attorneys Haymond at the solicitation of business symptomatic affairs. To the Rules Committee to rein in conduct, that they the profes

Dru Nadler

Robinson & Cole Gets a Managing Partner for the '90s

Can the quintessential nice guy keep his friends and the firm's bottom-line intact in the midst of Connecticut's economic siege?

BY ROSEMARY P. McNICHOLAS

Wanted: Managing partner to represent the profession in nose-to-the-grindstone '90s. Must be young, self-starter, receptive to divergent points of view with no set agenda of own. Must be experienced manager willing to trim away unnecessary perquisites. In keeping with tone of the times, ideal candidate will be low-key, caring, ethical and very accessible; hardworking, but not a workaholic. Family orientation and civic involvement a plus. Egomaniacs and '80s holdovers given to flash and excess need not apply.

If the legal profession were seeking a representative to see it through this penitential decade, Alvin W. Thompson, the new managing partner at Hartford's Robinson & Cole, would be an obvious choice.

With a reputation among his partners as a great conciliator, and a gilded résumé boasting not one but two Ivy League degrees, there is no question that the 38-year-old Thompson, the first black managing partner in the history of Connecticut's major law firms, is on the profession's fast track.

In taking the helm of the state's sec-



congregation.

"Alvin is one of those annoying people you think there has to be something wrong with because he is too nice and never critical of others," says Donald K. Cawley, a partner at Hartford's Shipman & Goodwin, and friend and classmate of Thompson's at Yale Law School. "But what you see is what you get."

In fact, the only criticisms of Thompson to come out of more than a dozen interviews are that he keeps a messy desk, he isn't as good a basketball player as he says he is, and he suffers from male-pattern baldness.

It is his strong personal qualities that made his partners select him as their leader. Alan R. Spier, a member of the firm's management committee and chairman of the firm before it decided to create a managing partner position in 1988, offers an example. While Thompson's wife, Lesley, was finishing her Ph.D., she would occasionally bring their infant child to Thompson's office.

"He would work long hours doing a deal—and then he'd be changing a diaper on his desk," says Spier. "I thought, 'This guy is really at ease—taking care of kids, bringing them into the office.' That to me is real leadership—making others feel at ease, too."

Or take the case of Christmas Eve and Dwight H. Merriam, head of the firm's land-use section and Thompson's classmate at Yale Law (Class of 1978). Merriam had arranged to meet with family in Massachusetts on Christmas Day, but was "home alone" on Christmas Eve. After learning that secondhand, Thompson called and invited him to spend Christmas Eve with the Thompson family at services at Hartford's Center Church. Merriam did.

"That my managing partner would take the time to call me to suggest I go with him to his church is really wonderful," Merriam says.

And that sensibility translates into concrete management skills, Merriam adds. As a manager, Thompson "is accessible, responsive and open to new ideas, qualities that are crucial for success" in the changing legal marketplace, says Merriam.

"You don't have to have a firm agenda or an opinionated style to be a good managing partner," he adds. "Alvin will be the perfect managing partner as we work our way through the '90s."

And says Merriam, in a view echoed by others interviewed, Thompson's race is simply incidental—except in one respect: "It signals a departure from the mythical past of Robinson & Cole" as a "blue-blooded, old-line" law firm. "It will be perceived as significant," says Thompson, "but for me, personally, it isn't such a big deal. It is a comment on my personal relationship with my partners. It is a compliment to me, no matter what my race."

'A Moral Leader'

Thompson grew up in inner-city Baltimore. His father died when he was 2, leaving his mother, Grizell Parsons, to rear six children alone, after her second marriage ended in divorce.

Education was important to Grizell; under his mother's watchful eye, Thompson excelled in school. A junior high school science teacher was so impressed that he recommended Thompson for a scholarship to the Gilman School, a progressive private

ond-largest firm, the affable Thompson has pledged to strengthen Robinson & Cole's bottom line without sacrificing the firm's morale. His partners are betting he can do it; Thompson is one of those rare individuals who has mastered every challenge he's undertaken, and, rather than antagonizing colleagues and competitors along the way, has turned them into admirers.

But the question lingers: Can the quintessential nice guy keep his friends and the firm's bottom-line intact in the midst of Connecticut's economic siege? As managing partner, Thompson could be forced to make some unpopular choices that will test just how far he is willing to take his unflinching "people orientation."

The Messy Desk

Looking at Thompson's record of achievement, the casual observer would wager that he is up to his newest challenge of managing both money and morale.

The graduate of Princeton University and Yale Law School has risen quickly in the law firm's ranks. Before becoming managing partner in November, Thompson headed the firm's business finance section, chaired its hiring committee and was a member of its management committee.

He's done all that while pursuing a variety of community activities. On weekends, Thompson can be found in Hartford's North End, doing volunteer work as the chairman of the advisory committee to the Salvation Army's Northeast Corps. On Sunday he can be found teaching Sunday school to junior high school students at Hartford's Center Church, where he served from 1984 to '88 as moderator, or lay leader of the

CONTENTS

BEHIND THE BAR: Ellen Peters on the U.S. Supreme Court?	17
BOTTOM LINE	23
CLASSIFIED	30
COURT REPORTERS DIRECTORY	12
COURT TV SCHEDULE: Jeffrey Dahmer's Trial Begins	8
FEDERAL COURT DIGEST	27
FOR THE RECORD: CBA Delegates Endorse Fees for Discipline Office	13
INDEX OF NAMES	4
LAWYERS DIARY	8
ON THE MOVE	18
PERSPECTIVES: The Private Costs of Public Exposure	20
PRACTICE MANAGEMENT	22
PROFESSIONAL ANNOUNCEMENTS	5
SUPERIOR COURT SUMMARIES	25

The Superior Highlights column will appear next week and every other week thereafter.

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Robinson & Cole's '90s Man

Continued from PAGE 2

high school in the city's north end. Although the school had just begun an ambitious plan to diversify its student population, Thompson was just one of a few poor and minority students on the predominantly white, upper-middle class campus.

The school's headmaster, Redmond C. S. Finney, believes Thompson might have felt uncomfortable at the school, initially, "but didn't show it."

"He was in the distinct minority—but by the way he handled it, he helped other students from center city," Finney says. Thompson not only "handled" high school but became a star student and "moral and intellectual leader."

A member of the glee club and baseball, basketball and cross country teams, Thompson received a coveted U.S. presidential scholarship for academic excellence in his senior year.

With a package of loans and a scholarship, Thompson was accepted at Princeton in 1971. His roommate throughout college, Dr. Anthony Carter, a microbiologist on the faculty at Virginia Medical College in Richmond, depicts Thompson as very much in the mainstream during his college years, "a down-to-earth kind of person who got along with everybody."

While Princeton has a reputation for social exclusivity, Carter, who is black, says he and Thompson were never affected by it. While some black students lived in all black dorms, Carter and Thompson chose to live in racially

ball team, tutored, and worked his way up to become a coordinator of the school's dining halls, supervising student staff, ordering inventory, and managing the overall food service operations.

Thompson was attracted by law's intellectual challenge, and decided to apply to Yale Law on the recommendation of a career adviser, a Yale Law

'Alvin is one of those Annoying people you think there has to be something wrong with because he is too nice and never critical of others. But what you see is what you get.'

Donald K. Cawley
Partner, Shipman & Goodwin

alum, and a professor who taught in Princeton's Afro-American studies program. "They thought Yale would suit me best because it was more policy oriented," says Thompson. "You didn't just learn black-letter law."

While at Yale Law, Thompson worked for more than a year at New Haven Legal Assistance Association's Dixwell Avenue office. Former U.S. Rep. Bruce Morrison, the office's managing attorney

Firm partner Alan R. Spier was impressed when he saw Thompson changing his child's diaper at his desk. "I thought, 'This guy is really at ease—taking care of kids, bringing them into the office.' That to me is real leadership—making others feel at ease, too."



Gail Lewis

says. "He was into other things. We would sit together and spend lunch talking about New Haven, poverty, or how the Red Sox did."

"He cared about you and what you were talking about," he adds. "Not a hell of a lot of people there did."

Classmate J. Hanson Guest, now a partner at Hartford's Baglin & Guest, remembers Thompson as "an independent thinker with a lot of integrity."

"But with his demeanor, he doesn't give his opinions freely," Guest says. "He's not afraid to take a stand on a position he believes in." On the other hand, he adds, Thompson personally "is a pretty conservative guy."

Thompson Ascending

During summers at Yale Law, Thompson worked as a summer associate at Semmes, Bowen & Semmes in

Baltimore. He "intended to go back to that firm" after graduation, but personal matters intervened; Thompson's college sweetheart, Lesley Morgan, was in the midst of a doctoral program at the Yale School of Forestry and Environmental Studies. Thompson decided to stay in Connecticut. The couple was married two days before Thompson's graduation from Yale in 1978, and he accepted an offer at Robinson & Cole.

"I liked the people at this firm," he says. "It had a diverse practice, and I felt I would be given a chance to try different things." In his first year as an associate, Thompson was sort of a free agent, working in litigation, real estate and corporate finance. At the end of his first year, he took over all of the firm's immigration work, an area now handled by partner Alice De Tora.

See AT STATE'S on PAGE 18



Gail Lewis

Thompson's ascendancy "signals a departure from the mythical past of Robinson & Cole" as a "blue-blooded, old-line" law firm, says partner Dwight H. Merriam. "Alvin will be the perfect managing partner as we work our way through the '90s."

mixed student housing, "enjoying the campus and maximizing the number of interactions we could have with a variety of people," says Carter. But, he adds, Thompson never forgot his origins.

"Although Alvin has been in a predominantly white world, he has never lost sight of where he comes from," says Carter. "A certain amount of black pride remains."

At Princeton, Thompson majored in history, concentrating on Civil War history and the period from Reconstruction to World War I. He wrote histories of the Trenton, N.J., National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and the New Brunswick NAACP for his junior paper and senior thesis. In his spare time, he coached a boys' basket-

at the time, remembers Thompson as "a superstar."

"When he was in the office it was like having another lawyer there," Morrison says. "You come to rely on people who are really good. Alvin was one of those people."

Classmates at Yale Law remember Thompson as "a very smart guy," but the kind of person who was not totally consumed by school.

"A lot of people at school were into intellectual one-upsmanship," recalls Jon Alander, a Thompson classmate who is now Connecticut's commissioner of human resources. "They were interested in proving themselves intellectually superior, even at lunch."

"Alvin was multi-faceted," Alander

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Continued from PAGE 7

"It was a fun, challenging, very technical area," he says. "You need to know the law inside out. People are under pressure—you need strong counseling skills. You have to handle the legal aspects and give personal advice."

Thompson also had the luxury of managing files himself, an opportunity he believes helped him to become a better lawyer. "Those were my files. I went to court all by myself. I didn't consult with anyone on them."

But the "intellectual challenge" of technical finance and commercial work soon lured Thompson into the firm's business finance section. He stayed there, and after being named partner in 1985, rose to head the section. Thompson joined the firm's hiring committee, and served as its chairman from 1985 to 1989. From there, he was appointed to the firm's five-partner management committee.

Thompson's leadership qualities emerge even in his volunteer work. As president of the board at a Hartford women's shelter, Thompson 'makes people feel comfortable and then empowers them to make decisions,' says the shelter's former director.

After managing partner H. Bissell "Ted" Carey III's three-year term as managing partner ended last fall, Thompson was placed on the short list of candidates for the job.

Initially, Thompson says he had "planned to opt off the ballot," because, he says, "I thought I was too young."

"You have to commit to spending the time on managing the firm's affairs," he says. "There is less time spent on legal matters." He says several partners, whom Thompson would not name, asked him to reconsider. Ultimately he stayed on the ballot and was elected to a three-year term.

A Great Communicator

Few of his colleagues are surprised that Thompson has ascended to the helm of Robinson & Cole. Simply put, says Guest, "he's so competent—it just had to



Connecticut Human Resources Commissioner Jon Alander, who attended Yale Law with Thompson, says his classmate was "multi-faceted." "He cared about you and what you were talking about. Not a hell of a lot of people there did."

happen."

Former firm chairman Spier says Thompson's ability to communicate is one of the key factors in his ascension. To illustrate this point, Spier recalls associate evaluations he conducted with Thompson. "Alvin has an extraordinary ability to communicate," says Spier. "He can communicate tough stuff in a nice, up-front way. I was astonished at how well he did it."

Classmate Alander believes the fact that "people motivate Alvin more than just law" would make him an effective managing partner. "I would assume that morale there would be pretty high," he adds.

The lawyers at Robinson & Cole do seem to rally around Thompson. During photographs for this article, a half-dozen lawyers passed by to gently needle him and give moral support. According to litigation head Janet Hall, one of the reasons for Thompson's popularity is that

"he listens to you."

"You have a sense that he respects your point of view even if he doesn't agree with it," she says.

Thompson's volunteer work as president of the board of Hartford's Gray Lodge, also known as The Shelter for Women, demonstrated his ability to manage a group with often divided opinions, says Rose Alma Senatore, who was the agency's executive director before her appointment as commissioner of the Department of Children and Youth Services last year.

"He makes people feel comfortable and then empowers them to make decisions," she explains. "To be able to get

25 people motivated and moving in the right direction is very unique."

A Non-Agenda

While Thompson says he hasn't developed specific directions for the firm's practice areas, he says the firm will continue to expand its 23-lawyer environmental practice, as well as its 13-lawyer international practice. He stresses, however, that the firm needs to stay "adaptable."

Despite Thompson's "people" orientation, he intends to pay close attention to the firm's bottom line. Over the past year, he says, the firm has tried to eliminate some discretionary expenses, and is now "more diligent" in assessing and reviewing expenditures. The firm hired 15 new associates in 1991, as opposed to 17 the year before, and "will probably have a smaller summer program" this year, he says.

Increasing billing controls is also a priority. "We need to recapture more of our fees from our clients," he says.

Among other cutbacks, Thompson says the firm's professional activities budget is undergoing careful scrutiny, to see which seminars and association memberships are really useful and cost-effective. By "pre-approving" expenses for seminar attendance, he says, "our costs have gone down."

But this attention to firm expenses will not stop Thompson from "keeping the firm a nice place to work," in fact, he says, that is a priority. He plans to continue the "Friday socials," held at the firm after work, at which partners, associates and staff as well as their spouses and children get together "to have a beer and talk."

The firm should also "value diversity," he says, and he intends to continue the firm's minority recruitment effort, spearheaded by former managing partner Carey.

But according to a survey on hiring practices conducted by *The National Law Journal*, the firm still has a long way to go; it counts just three black lawyers, and no Hispanic or other minority lawyers among its 146-lawyer staff. The state's largest firm, Day, Berry & Howard, has 230 lawyers, 12 of whom are minorities; of those, eight are black.

Continued on NEXT PAGE

ON THE MOVE

Lucille Brown, who heads the employment law practice group at Schatz & Schatz, Ribicoff & Kotkin, has been elected to the board of directors of Planned Parenthood of Connecticut. Brown will serve on the Planned Parenthood board on an interim basis until June, when she will be nominated for a full three-year term. Brown was formerly associate general counsel for the Bank of New England Corp. and general

counsel for Connecticut Bank and Trust Co.

Hartford's McVane, Bellobuono & Kuzmak has changed its name to McVane, Bellobuono, Kuzmak & Wiezalis. Raymond J. Wiezalis, a former assistant state's attorney in Hartford County, has been a partner at the firm since 1990. He specializes in criminal defense and civil litigation.



Eaglin & Guest partner J. Hanson Guest, another classmate, says he was not surprised when he learned Thompson had been made managing partner. "He's so competent—it just had to happen."

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three are Hispanic and one is Asian. At Stamford's Cummings & Lockwood, two of the firm's 148 lawyers are black, one is Hispanic and one is Asian.

Thompson acknowledges that the numbers of minority lawyers at Robinson & Cole is less than optimal. But he expects these numbers to grow as a result of the firm's participation in "first-year programs," at the University of Connecticut School of Law and Howard University School of Law, designed to aid minority students in getting law firm experience as first-year summer associates. Obtaining that experience, says Thompson, will enable them to get positions in bigger and better firms after graduation. (Despite cutbacks in the number of associates the firm will hire this year, Thompson says the first-year program recruits will not be affected). In addition, he says the firm recently hired a minority law student from UConn to work in the firm during the school year.

Attracting more minority lawyers, Thompson says, is an investment in the firm's future. "The client base has become more diverse," he says. "Firms that are more diverse relate better to clients."

Thompson dislikes making sweeping statements under the label of "affirmative action," saying he believes it implies that minority candidates are not as qualified as others. "I don't concede that minority candidates are less qualified than candidates in general," he says. Instead, Thompson views affirmative

Despite his 'people' orientation, Thompson intends to pay close attention to the firm's bottom line. We need to recapture more of our fees from our clients,' he says.

action as "taking extra steps to make sure you are truly evaluating a candidate's potential."

"When I interview a candidate, I try to look at all the potential indicators that would determine if the student has what it takes to be a good lawyer—like client skills, intelligence, and work ethic," Thompson says, "not simply traditional factors, like if one has been a good law student."

When asked if he has benefited from that type of affirmative action, Thompson replies with a firm "yes."

"I got scholarships through college and law school," he says. "I went on a recruiting trip at Yale Law School. I'm sure my being a minority student had something to do with that."

Thompson is quick to praise "all the people who have helped me become what I am."

"I'm not a minority who says 'I did everything on my own,'" he says. "I think lots of people have helped me to

Former U.S. Rep. Bruce Morrison was managing attorney at the New Haven Legal Assistance Association when Thompson worked there as a law student. Morrison remembers him as "a superstar."



do what I've been able to do, and I feel an obligation to do the same for others."

To that end, Thompson, who co-chairs the American Bar Association's Ad Hoc Committee on Involvement of Women and Minorities for the Section of Business Law, has helped to "encourage minorities and women to get involved" in the section's activities. He says he is "pleased that the legal profession has taken affirmative steps to make itself open to people who are not white males."

Not surprisingly, for a man who has long abided by an honor code, Thompson views law as a "profession" in the classical sense of the word. "I realize there are pressures to act more like a business," he says. "But there are expectations to how we will operate. There is a code of ethics and a sense of professional responsibility that should make us think about our role in society, to make us contributors to society, instead of being just neutral or on the negative side."

Alvin Thompson is a contributor.

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Back to basics

■ Enfield-based Lego Systems is building profits as consumers return to simple, inexpensive toys. **Page 3.**

Tax-time checkup

■ Columnist Andrew Leckey reminds IRA investors to diversify and watch rate and market trends. **Page 11.**

The Hartford Courant BUSINESS WEEKLY

For the week of
February 10, 1992

Multicultural mixer

■ Columnist Patricia Seremet finds a diverse audience at a reception for a photo exhibit. **Page 14.**

Index

After Hours	14	Labor	3
Bank Rates	10	Money Funds	7
Bankruptcies	15	Patents	6
Blocks	10	People	15
Insiders	9	Stocks	11

By VIVIAN B. MARTIN
Special to The Courant

Put 50 lawyers together in a room and you're likely to get, well... a fight.

"Lawyers are notorious for creating this sense of disagreement," says Jack Kennedy, a partner in the Hartford-based law firm of Robinson & Cole.

That's why when it was time for Kennedy and his partners to choose a new managing partner from among their ranks — someone to handle the nuts and bolts of budgeting as well as long-range planning — the partnership voted for Alvin W. Thompson.

"Let's assume he and I disagree," says Janet Hall, head of the firm's trial lawyers. "He'll listen. He can tell you he thinks you're off the wall and basically say you're crazy without offending. This is what leads to, if not consensus, at least people who are riled up feel they were listened to and respected."

In choosing the 38-year-old Thompson — a Yale law graduate who specializes in business and corporate finance — Robinson & Cole also unintentionally has added new chapters to local and national legal history.

Thompson is one of the first blacks to become a managing partner in a major law firm, a symbol of the "old-boy network."

Although several members of racial and ethnic minorities have made it to the management committees of leading law firms — one of the three assistant managing partners at Hale and Dorr in Boston is black — only two in the nation have been elected to this chief executive post.

"It's rare," says Marion Tucker, a staff worker with the American Bar Association's Commission on Minorities in the Legal Profession. "There's a chance there may be someone we don't know about, but



Tony Bacowicz / The Hartford Courant

■ Alvin W. Thompson, 38, became the elected leader of the 147-year-old Hartford law firm last September.

Lawyer makes his mark and history, too

A black managing partner at Robinson & Cole

it's a highly remote possibility."

"We're really talking about an African-American becoming managing partner in one of the oldest and most prestigious firms in New England," says Sanford Cloud, vice president for corporate public involvement at Aetna Life & Casualty Co. and the first black to be hired and made a partner at Robinson & Cole.

"For this to happen is a major accomplishment on [Thompson's] part and a major statement for the firm," Cloud says.

Finding his way

Alvin Thompson had no master plan for the fast track. In some ways, his story is generic, his biography a common result of some of the civil rights and affirmative action initiatives of the '60s and '70s.

He grew up in Baltimore's inner city, one of six children raised by a woman who was first widowed (Thompson's father died when he was 2), then divorced.

Because he showed promise, a junior high school science teacher steered

Thompson to Gilman School, a private school where he was given a scholarship and put on the Ivy League track.

Thompson then went to Princeton because several of the people he admired at Gilman were Princeton alumni. He wanted to be an architect, but discarded that idea after working at an architectural firm one summer.

"I concluded what I liked was drafting, but I didn't like design, which is what architects do," he says.

But Thompson was being stimulated in new directions. He says a course he took as a freshman on the sociology of deviance was eye-opening.

"We set up systems for doing things efficiently, and sometimes you make it difficult for people who could make a contribution to society. You could have structure in a slightly different way, but you didn't because you didn't have to think of people who are different," he says of the course.

A history major, Thompson says he chose law as a career because it appeared to be an area that would give him more options for careers. After graduating from Princeton, Thompson studied law at Yale University, sometimes choosing courses despite the advice of more strategic-

minded classmates.

"I'm not oblivious to the implications of things. I have a sense of myself and what my priorities are in life. I didn't come into the firm saying, 'I've got to bill a lot of hours, figure out who the most important partners are.' I really concentrated on learning how to practice law, becoming a good lawyer, doing things that are satisfying to me," Thompson says.

Please see Lawyer, Page 8

8 THE HARTFORD COURANT Monday, February 10, 1992 Lawyer makes his mark and history, too

Continued from Page 1

Thompson tells his story in chronological order and extensive detail — the courses he took at Gilman; his job overseeing 108 people in a dining hall at Princeton; how he became a business-law specialist, joining Robinson & Cole in 1978; how he eventually co-headed the business finance section at the firm; how becoming a partner or managing partner had never been a goal.

"I used to accuse him of trying to write the perfect loan document. He's that precise," says Chip Forge, a lending officer at Fleet Bank who began working with Thompson and others at Robinson & Cole when Forge was at the former Connecticut Bank and Trust Co.

"His low-key approach is very effective for us," says John Schmidt, associate general counsel at Pitney Bowes, for whom Thompson has done some immigration work. Pitney Bowes' extensive United Kingdom operation requires it to bring in workers from other countries who need visas and assistance.

"His polite, calm demeanor is very effective in dealing with the administrators at the [Immigration and Naturalization Service]," Schmidt says. "The career people there are the ones who ultimately make decisions, and there's not a lot of flexibility in terms of the law."

Says Thompson, "The approach of our firm overall in business and corporate work is we think of ourselves as deal-makers. Different people have different needs. Try to protect your partner, but see what it is the other side really needs ... come up with something that is what I think is a win-win situation."

"I think I've learned it from the lawyers in this firm. ... It happens to be a lot more compatible with my personality, too. It isn't something I rebelled against. I had a natural tendency to do it anyway."

Drafted for the job

All of the lawyers in the partnership are candidates for managing partner unless they withdraw their names. In practical terms, however, as Managing Director Richard O'Brien points out, "Not a tremendous number of people either want or are qualified for the job."

Thompson considered withdrawing his name and instead seeking reelection to the post reserved for an under-40 partner on the five-person managing committee, which works with the managing partner.

There were discussions; names were deleted; some candidates emerged. Somewhere in this process, Thompson was asked to keep his name in consideration. When the official balloting took place, he had a majority of the votes.

"I said, 'Oh, my goodness, this is going to be interesting.' The job is tough, very challenging. I'm used to having a lot of irons in the fire at once," says Thompson, who so far still is trying to keep up with his caseload, even though managing partner is a full-time job.

There is no immediate job comparison to managing partner at a law firm. Although the lawyer who gets the job is the chief executive officer, a law partnership is not hierarchical.

A managing partner does not have



Robinson & Cole

■ **Lucius Robinson Jr.**, who served as senior partner of Robinson & Cole for 30 years, hired the firm's first black lawyer in 1970.

"I said, 'Oh, my goodness, this is going to be interesting.' The job is tough, very challenging."

Alvin W. Thompson
On his election to lead firm

authority over the other partners, but is simply the elected leader. The challenge that a law firm faces is striking a balance between a town meeting form of operation, where everybody gets a say on everything, and a representative government, in which representatives are elected on the people's behalf.

"Let's assume you've got 50 people talking about the budget," says H. Bissell Carey III, who held the managing partner's post for three years until Thompson's election. "Someone trots out a budget that says you're going to spend X on one line item and somebody else says, 'Why are you going to spend that?' Then someone else gets into it, and they're lawyers, so debate is something they enjoy."

Carey was the first person to hold the post. Until three years ago, Robinson & Cole had been managed by an executive committee and six or seven other groups, an extension of an approach that Lucius Robinson Jr. instituted upon retiring in the mid-1970s. Rather than appoint a senior partner, as his father had done, Lucius Jr. sought a more modern approach.

The firm's growth — 12 to 15 new

associates a year through much of the 1980s, and an expanding Stamford branch office — as well as the changing demands of the legal profession dictated that the firm change course. The result, says Kennedy, the partner who steered the firm's redesign, was a five-person managing committee — complete with generation slots, to ensure that all generations of lawyers have a voice — and a managing partner.

Joel Henning, co-senior vice president of Hildebrandt Inc., a Somerville, N.J.-based legal consulting firm, says more law firms are moving toward more centralized governance because the sprawling committee approach has caused the demise of many firms, especially in these competitive times.

The competition in Connecticut includes at least 10 law firms that have 50 or more lawyers. Day Berry & Howard is the largest, with more than 200; Robinson & Cole and Stamford-based Cummings & Lockwood move in and out of second place with about 150 each; two other firms hover in the 100-lawyer range.

And major firms' fee structures are similar: the range is approximately \$100 to \$350 hourly for top lawyers. With starting-associate salaries in the high \$50,000s to low \$60,000s around the state (partners' six-figure incomes vary, and are set by in-house committees) and other costs increasing, law firms are spending more time trying to lure business.

A place in history

Thompson was voted into the post at the end of September, but he did not let the firm send out a press



File photo

■ **Francis W. Cole** was the first of two generations of Coles to practice at Robinson & Cole. He came in 1910 and left in the '30s.

release until December because he wanted to get settled into the job before dealing with news media interviews and other public attention.

"I thought it was significant for me, in a very personal sense, that my partners were telling me they were respecting me and had confidence in my ability to handle the top job," Thompson says.

But although the Robinson & Cole partners clearly were voting for someone who, in the words of Kennedy, "is in tune with the firm's culture," Thompson and the firm cannot escape the fact they made history.

In addition to there being very few minority managing partners, minority-group members account for only 550 of the 24,000 partners in major law firms in the nation.

Thompson is one of only four minority partners in major law firms in the state. John Rose Jr. was made a partner at Ribicoff & Kotkin in 1972. When that firm ended, Rose was a name partner in another firm, and is now a partner at Tarlow, Levy & Droney in Farmington.

Joseph Moniz is a partner at Day Berry & Howard, and Lucille Brown, former general counsel at Connecticut Bank and Trust, is now a partner at Schatz & Schatz, Ribicoff & Kotkin.

Azuwike H. Ndukwu, an attorney at United Technologies Corp. who heads the Connecticut Bar Association's Committee to Attract and Promote Minority Participation in the Legal Profession, says law firms have had difficulty retaining members of minority groups.

Moreover, minority lawyers have not had the same opportunities to make lateral moves between law

firms as whites, he says.

But Ndukwu is optimistic about a program agreed to by 16 firms — including all of the major ones in the state — that seeks to increase the ranks of minority lawyers. They have come to realize that it's in their best interests to have a legal staff that represents the community," he says.

Even as he congratulates Robinson & Cole, Ndukwu says it's important to view Thompson's election as an individual achievement.

John Parsons, at 91 the oldest living retired partner, indirectly makes the same point.

Upon hearing of Thompson's election, Parsons says, he didn't think of race, although he did think Thompson was somewhat young for the job. What he was glad to hear was that Thompson, despite his reluctance, agreed to keep his name in contention for managing partner.

"That's the kind of loyalty we've always had at the firm," Parsons says.

Progressive atmosphere

Several lawyers familiar with major law firms in the state consider Robinson & Cole to be the one where it was most likely that a minority-group member would make a quiet rise to managing partner.

The firm, whose partners' average age is 45, long has nurtured an atmosphere of progressiveness that is not only evident in the first-name greetings among the nearly 350 people who work there, but also in the enthusiastic embrace of some of the newer management ideas said to be crucial to law firms' survival in the increasingly competitive '90s.

Among the new approaches are

centralized management and in-house marketing. The firm also has thrown out an age-old practice of listing all of its lawyers on the letterhead because it was unattractive and expensive.

"Not many firms manage to have that [progressive] culture," says Vivien Blackford, a psychological consultant with the Center for Management at the Institute of Living, in Hartford.

"Very few have a culture of respect that includes [all of the non-partners]. A few manage to have the feeling among partners — I call it esprit de corps — the feeling that if you're good enough to be a partner in the firm, I'm going to treat you with respect. Few have that," says Blackford, who works with law firms and family businesses.

"But it has a great deal to do with their success in terms of profit. There is a connection," she says.

Robinson & Cole does it all — from trusts and estates to an expanding European presence. But this being an age of specialization, lawyers are in sections or practice groups, a number of which are especially competitive and high-profile — including the environmental section, the land-use section and the real estate section.

Robinson & Cole was the lead counsel for Travelers Corp. in the eight-month trial that followed the Civic Center roof collapse, and more recently it defended Bridgeport in the L'Ambiance Plaza collapse.

A third of the firm's lawyers are assigned to the trial division — and nearly half of the firm's members are litigators.

"Our people actually try cases, which is unusual these days. In a given week, we might have three or four trials going. It's not unusual for some lawyers who are considered litigators to go five years without trying a case," Hall says.

Despite the intensive work, the firm maintains an atmosphere that O'Brien — a former Army colonel who has managed all non-lawyer employees and operations for 10 years — describes as "almost casual."

"We have ugly-tie contests. We just bought a popcorn popper, and the person who guesses the number of kernels gets it," he says.

The lounge is host to Friday after-work gatherings where everyone from secretaries to senior partners unwinds. The partnership voted to forgo its annual Christmas party and donate the money to feed the homeless a holiday meal. The lawyers served it.

Janet Hall — the first of seven women to make partner at the firm — describes the atmosphere as refreshing because "everybody doesn't act and look alike with the same suspenders."

'And leave Hartford?'

The law firm began when L.F. Robinson opened an office overlooking the Connecticut River in 1845, several years after the start of such area institutions as the Wadsworth Atheneum and Miss Porter's School.

Robinson began practicing at a time when lawyers did not have to go to law school, but could serve apprenticeships instead, says John M. Donahue, a partner who retired from the firm last year.

Robinson died when he was in his 30s, but by then his brother, Henry, had entered the firm and continued the practice.

Henry Robinson was a member of

"The people who are in the firm are very comfortable about who they are and what they are part of ..."

Sanford Cloud

Former partner Robinson & Cole

many civic boards, a friend of Mark Twain's, and Hartford's mayor from 1872 to 1874. He worked on Benjamin Harrison's presidential campaign and, according to Donahue, turned down an ambassadorship to Madrid, saying in puzzlement, "What? And leave Hartford?"

The Cole half of the firm was Francis W. Cole, who Donahue says arrived in 1910. Cole, whose two sons later joined the firm and stayed until retirement, left in the 1930s to work as general counsel for Travelers, later becoming chief executive officer.

Henry Robinson's sons, Lucius F. Robinson Sr. and John Robinson, joined the firm in the 1890s. The two would still be there when Parsons joined in 1926 after receiving undergraduate and law degrees from Yale.

Since the firm's founding, the partners have included eight lawyers from four generations of the Robinson family and three lawyers from two generations of Coles. The only Robinson still practicing at the firm is Barclay Robinson Jr., 57, head of the firm's employee relations section.

Through much of the 1920s, the firm was essentially a family business, though shortly after Parsons' arrival, the Hartfordites hired a foreigner of sorts.

"He was from Manchester," Parsons says. Ernest McCormick gave Robinson & Cole its start in the bond counsel business.

There were 12 lawyers in 1951 when Donahue joined Robinson, Robinson & Cole (the name would be shortened in 1984 when the firm moved to its current quarters on floors 26 through 29 at One Commercial Plaza). By then, the firm was under the "rule" of Lucius Robinson Jr., whose father turned it over to him in the 1940s.

Lucius Jr., Parsons says, "was a benevolent dictator," describing the tremendous influence the man had in shaping the practice, attitudes and atmosphere during the 30 years he was senior partner.

In 1970, it was Lucius Jr. — who died four years ago at the age of 92 — who informed the partnership about his plans to hire an impressive Howard University graduate named Sanford Cloud. At that time, only one other firm, then known as Ribicoff & Kotkin, had hired a black.

"Lucius Robinson set the tone when I was a young associate," says Cloud, who left the firm in 1977, shortly after making partner, to run for the state Senate. "He and other partners laid the foundation for the kind of environment" that exists today.

"The people who are in the firm are very comfortable about who they are and what they are part of, and they feel very secure about what their firm is, what it represents. They know they represent the best in the legal profession, so [Alvin Thompson's election] would happen there because of that personality trait within the firm."

State roundup

Continued from Page 5

Hartford Chamber of Commerce is offering "Greater Hartford Horizons," a 248-page pictorial guide to the Hartford region.

The full-color, hardcover book includes essays by Joel Lang. Also included are profiles of 57 local companies, compiled by Hartford writer Christine Palm.

The guide costs \$39.95. More information may be obtained by calling the chamber of commerce communications department at 525-4451.

Air Force honors Hamilton Standard

WINDSOR LOCKS — Hamilton Standard received an award from Warner Robins Air Force Base Air Logistics Center for its work on the 54H60 propeller, used on the Lockheed C-130 military transport aircraft.

Employees at Hamilton Standard and the base have been working together since 1989 to improve the propeller.

Checklist offered for tax returns

HARTFORD — The Connecticut Society of Certified Public Accountants is offering a free brochure that taxpayers can use as a checklist when preparing their 1991 federal income tax returns.

The brochure, "Thirty-two Tax Facts," is available by sending a stamped, self-addressed envelope to "Tax Facts", c/o Connecticut Society of Certified Public Accountants, 179 Allyn St., Suite 201, Hartford 06103-1491. Supplies are limited.

Insurance companies announce merger

MIDDLETOWN — The Insurance and Real Estate Center Inc. has

merged with Damman Insurance Associates of Westport and Wallingford. Damman Insurance has provided complete services in southern Connecticut for more than 60 years.

The Insurance and Real Estate Center will remain at 124 Court St., and will be joined by the Damman/Wallingford staff.

Simsbury firm to buy C. Cowles stock

Insurance Capitol Holdings Corp., Simsbury, will acquire the outstanding shares of C. Cowles & Co., New Haven, for \$70 a share.

C. Cowles makes precision-metal stampings, plastic moldings, automotive trim, outdoor-lighting systems and boiler controls. The company's subsidiaries include Phillips Manufacturing Co. and Century Plastics Co., Canton, Mass.; ABS Lighting Inc., Bloomfield; and Cowles Products Co. Inc. and Hydrolevel Co., New Haven.

Firm announces debt reduction

DARIEN — EXECUTONE Information Systems Inc. completed its exchange offer for 44 percent of its outstanding 7½ percent convertible subordinated debentures, due 2011.

The company has accepted \$14,997,000 aggregate principal amount of debentures in the exchange offer, which is 20 percent more than the minimum amount sought under the exchange offer.

The company also announced it has completed the renegotiation of the balance of its note remaining from the acquisition of Executone Inc. from Contel Corp., from \$10 million down to \$6.7 million.

Marketing and Business Notes

■ **Data Management Inc.**, Farmington, has published a payroll tax chart that gives Connecticut businesses easy access to correct payroll withholding figures for both

Connecticut and federal income taxes when preparing a weekly payroll. The Connecticut edition of "Circular Easy: 1992 State & Federal Payroll Withholding Tax Chart" is a 32-page booklet. More information is available by calling William Wyre, market manager, or Daniel A. Hincks, president, at 677-8586.

■ **Marquadt & Roche Inc.**, Stamford, received a U.S. marketing communications account from Engelhard Corp., Iselin, N.J. Marquadt & Roche will create advertising, direct marketing and collateral programs for Engelhard's three business segments: catalysts and chemicals, pigments and additives, and engineered materials and precious metals management.

■ **Cree Communications**, Bloomfield, was retained by Kostin, Ruffkess & Co., West Hartford, to develop and put into effect a fully integrated marketing communications plan. Cree Communications will develop a customized client newsletter and marketing materials to promote its management advisory services.

■ **United Parcel Service Inc.**, Atlanta, Ga., has appointed Delmhorst & Sheehan Inc., New York, to manage the marketing effort for the company's former headquarters in Greenwich.

■ **Williams & House**, Avon, was retained by the American Paper Institute, based in New York City, to assist with marketing a book, "Printing on Text & Cover Papers: Texture & Color."

■ **The Emery Group**, Farmington, was named by Yankee Hospitality Search to handle promotion and public relations activities. The Canton firm specializes in recruiting management employees for hotels and restaurants.

■ **Welch Inc.**, Ridgefield, was named to handle graphic design for three external newsletters of PHH Relocation and Real Estate Management Services, Wilton. The publications, which are distributed to corporate relocation decision-makers, are produced quarterly.

Documentary shows workplace life outside office

Continued from Page 3

The producers' sympathies are usually clear, but O'Neill said they work to be fair to the employer's side.

"We feel it's important to understand management's point of view," she said.

Canty and Harriety said they hope the show will build an audience among Connecticut unionists and other workers.

"We are committed to the program because the issues of working people and unions don't get out enough to the general public," Har-

riety said. "This is an excellent way of doing that, but unions have to do this times 100 if we really want people to understand what we are all about."

Michael Remez is a *Courant* business writer.



Insiders

■ **Acmet Corp.**, East Hartford; interiors contractor. **Henry W. Nozko**, officer, director and beneficial owner, disposed of by gift 1,300 shares of class C common stock at an unreported price per share Dec. 31 and now directly and/or indirectly holds 136,524 common shares and 156,424 class C shares.

■ **Berkley (W.R.) Corp.**, Greenwich; insurance. **Edwin L. Heer**, vice president, sold 2,044 shares of common stock at \$31.50 a share Jan. 31 and now directly holds 4,647 shares.

■ **Shawmut National Corp.**, Hartford and Boston; bank holding company, parent of Connecticut National Bank. **Joel B. Alvord**, chairman, disposed of by gift 1,104 shares of common stock at an unreported price per share Dec. 31 and now directly and indirectly holds 157,140 shares.

Insiders is written by Invest/Net Inc., Fort Lauderdale, Fla., a registered investment adviser. Compiled for the week of Feb. 3.

The listed trades, involving Connecticut companies or companies with direct ties to the state, were made directly or indirectly by the named officer, director or shareholder and were taken from documents filed with the Securities and Exchange Commission, and the New York Stock Exchange and the American Stock Exchange.



New businesses

■ **ERA Property Center**, 100 Business Park Drive, New Hartford, offers real estate-related services such as selling properties, assisting buyers, builder and contractor services, subdivision and condominium services, rentals, appraisals and insurance. More information is available from Ernie Rossi, 496-1995.

■ **College Bound Financial Aid and Consulting Services**, 340 Broad St., Windsor, helps college-bound students and their parents apply for financial aid. More information can be obtained by calling 683-8903.