

Jawn Ross, c'94, co-owns Ryker's Cellars, an urban winery in Denver.

95 Kurtis Hassler, e'95, is a senior engineer with George Butler Associates in Omaha, Nebraska, where he lives.

Terrie Dillon Jordan, c'95, works as assistant manager at Do It Best. She and her husband, Rick, live in Smithville, Missouri.

Brett Limer, c'95, works as a software engineer for Sprint in Overland Park. He and **Shelby Canby Limer**, assoc., live in Gardner.

Byron Matthews, b'95, has been promoted to president and general manager of MHI Global. He and **Jennifer Zerbe Matthews**, j'94, make their home in Hinsdale, Illinois.

Bryan Rusch, a'95, is a senior architectural technician for Populous in Kansas City. He lives in Olathe.

Whitney Vliet Ward, c'95, directs the commercial division of Keller Williams Realty Hometown Partners. She and her husband, **Michael**, j'95, live in Wichita.

96 Blake Vande Garde, c'96, f'01, practices patent law with Wiggins & Vande Garde in Charlotte, North Carolina. He and **Nicole Copple Vande Garde**, n'96, live in Waxhaw.

David Nash, '96, manages regional sales for Film Ideas. He makes his home in Wheeling, Illinois.

97 Ryker Brandt, '97, co-owns Ryker's Cellars, an urban winery in Denver. **Jeffrey Carver**, d'97, directs church engagement at Brightpeak Financial. He

PROFILE by Heather Biele

No. 1,000 marks lawyer's pro bono adoption legacy

When Kansas City attorney Gene Balloun and his wife agreed to become foster parents in 1987, they had no idea what was in store for them. Fast forward 28 years, and the couple has cared for 29 children, adopted two of them and just celebrated Balloun's 1,000th pro bono adoption case. To say the experience has been life-changing is an understatement.

Balloun, b'51, f'54, a commercial litigator and partner in the law firm of Shook, Hardy and Bacon, didn't foresee handling adoption cases when he and his wife, Sheila, first joined a support group for foster families years ago. But when fellow parents discovered he was a lawyer, he became the go-to guy for legal advice about the adoption process.

"If you're a lawyer, people start asking questions," Balloun says. "Pretty soon I was doing adoptions for foster parents."

Balloun took each case on a pro bono basis and elected to direct the state fees to a post-secondary education scholarship fund he helped establish for children who have been in the foster care system in Kansas. To date, that fund has distributed more than \$625,000 to almost 500 children.

"We hear from the kids we've helped

sometimes," he says of the recipients of the scholarships. "A few even came to Shook, Hardy and Bacon after graduating. We help give kids a start, then they move on. We keep track of them as best we can."

Balloun says that although helping children and families in the foster care system can be difficult at times, it's always rewarding. He has racked up a number of memorable adoption cases over the years,

including one family who adopted five children at once. But the most unforgettable by far is his 1,000th case, which involved a single mother who adopted 10- and 12-year-old siblings.

"We had a really nice celebration at the courthouse," he says. "I got to thank so many people who have been involved, including my wife, kids and other lawyers at Shook, Hardy and Bacon who have helped with the cases. And the judge was so gracious, just wonderful."

Now that Balloun has reached a milestone in his work with foster care children, does he plan to let up? Not yet,



STEVE PUPPE

"Gene is a brilliant, passionate and completely humble hero among us," Lori Ross, president and CEO of Midwest Foster Care and Adoption Association, says of Balloun.

he says. Although he and his wife are no longer foster parents themselves, they still participate in foster parent support groups. He also serves on the board of directors of the Midwest Foster Care and Adoption Association.

Balloun's passion for providing permanent homes for children in need will send him back to the courtroom as well, ready for the next child, the next adoption case and the next milestone.

"Being able to help form and create a family is tremendously satisfying," he says. "And seeing happy kids and happy parents—there's nothing better." 