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Weightlifting attorney boosts up local nonprofit

With his 10-year drive to raise \$250,000 coming to an end, Cotter assesses the risks of 500-pound lifts

BY ROY STROM

Law Bulletin staff writer

Attorney Daniel A. Cotter can trace the start of his competitive weightlifting career to his 10-year college reunion.

A former center on the Monmouth College football team, Cotter quit lifting weights after graduating to focus on a law career and starting a family.

"I went to my 10th anniversary and people commented ... on how I'd gotten out of shape," he said. That motivated him to get back in the gym, he said.

Today, he can push 350 pounds straight off his chest, squat with 500 pounds laid across his shoulders and lift another 500 pounds from the ground to his waist.

Apart from kick-starting his workout regimen, his college reunion also indirectly led to Cotter so far raising about \$200,000 for Lawyers Lend-A-Hand to Youth, a nonprofit group that funnels resources from lawyers into local mentor programs. It partners with The Chicago Bar Association.

On July 28, Cotter will put on his 10th and potentially final weightlifting version of a walk-a-thon, "Lifting to Lend-A-Hand." He collects donations per pound for the three lifts — bench press, squat and deadlift — he performs in a competition.

"I was going to be competing anyway and I knew a lot of people were doing walk-a-thons and marathons to raise money, and I thought, 'Why not do it for

weightlifting?'" Cotter said he considered 11 years ago when he started the fundraiser.

He wanted to donate to mentoring programs, but with a young family, time proved something he could not give in 2002. So, by weightlifting that year he raised \$2,600. This year, he said he hopes to bring in \$45,000, a stretch given last year's \$30,000 haul.

Apart from recently turning 45, he said he picked that number to take him to a total raised in 10 years of \$250,000. Four years ago, he set that amount as a goal for the 10th and final year of the fundraiser.

"It's something I've committed to and it's not to say I won't be back for an 11th" year, he said.

But as a partner at Corey, Cotter, Heather & Richardson LLC, a father of a growing family and an aging man in a taxing sport, he said continuing to lift weights competitively might become difficult.

"Two years ago was probably the peak of my strength and I was training much harder," Cotter said.

"My lifting partner is 31 and he notices a difference each year. It just gets harder to train. In the past years I have probably done three, four or five workouts a week."

Still, he said he hopes "if it's a really good day" to lift a combined total of around 1,500 pounds at the July 28 Amateur American Powerlifting Federation's Chicago Summer Bash 9 competition.

These days, he said his



Attorney Daniel A. Cotter posed with weightlifting awards he won. Cotter said he hopes to raise \$45,000 in his 10th and possibly last weightlifting fundraiser for Lawyers Lend-A-Hand to Youth. *Ben Speckmann*

training rarely involves "maxing out," or lifting as much weight as possible in one repetition. He saves those "maxes" for competitions, he said.

"But when the meet's there, and the adrenaline's pumping, you can sometimes surprise yourself," he said.

Genita Robinson, Lawyers Lend-A-Hand to Youth's executive director, said the money Cotter raises serves an important need for her organization and the mentor programs it supports.

A third of the mentor programs where Lawyers Lend-A-Hand to Youth sends its donations budget less than \$40,000 a year, she said.

Two hundred mentees who provide a positive adult influence for inner-city youth often from broken homes can receive training for just \$1,000, she said.

The program raised a total of \$219,000 in 2011, its website says. That money served 12,000 youth.

"We've talked about how we need to grow our funding base and make sure we can continue to raise individual donations, not just from (Cotter's) lifting program," Robinson said, adding that the potential end to Cotter's fundraiser "is not something I love to talk about."

Michael Lee Abramson, an attorney at D1 Sports Holdings LLC and Cotter's former weightlifting partner, said Cotter "can definitely keep" competing.

"You have to look at the potential for injury," he said, adding that Cotter suffered a back injury about eight years ago. "What's the likelihood of that coming back and getting hurt again? And you ask yourself: 'Is it worth the risk?'"

Cotter said: "I'm healthy again and so I've got at least this year and then we'll see after that," he said.

To pledge a donation, e-mail liftingtolendahand@hotmail.com.