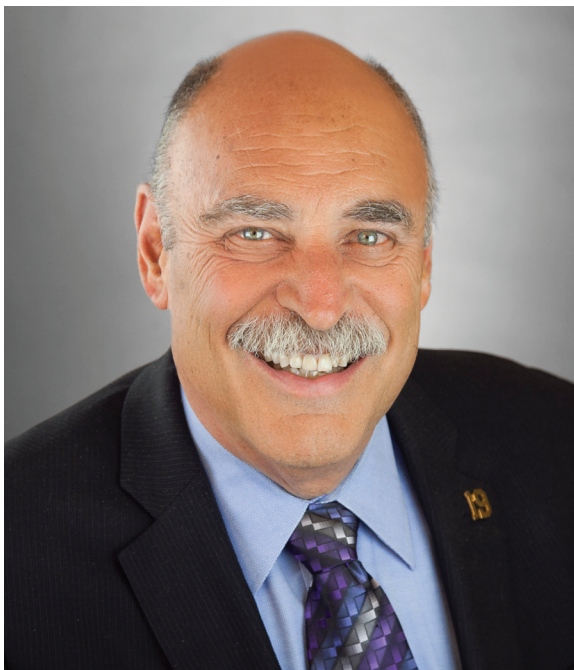


ALUMNI



Charles Tatelbaum '66

Clowning Around

By Mary K. Zajac

Throughout his professional life, **Charles Tatelbaum '66** has worn many hats. The attorney for Hinshaw & Culbertson LLP, has appeared on television and radio as a bankruptcy expert, chaired the boards of the local PBS and NPR stations in his adopted home of Fort Lauderdale, and written a wine column for the Fort Lauderdale Tower Club newsletter. He is also the personal representative and trustee of the estate of Baltimore Colts legend Johnny Unitas.

But on November 24, 2011, Tatelbaum donned a new chapeau—this one shaped like a pat of butter—and added professional clowning to his resume as he strolled down the Macy's Thanksgiving Day parade route wearing a red-and-white checked suit resembling a picnic cloth and carrying a five-foot-wide piece of toast. Tatelbaum's spot in the parade was just behind the Pillsbury Doughboy. Throughout the parade route, he and the other breakfast clowns (including his wife, Kitty, who was dressed as a stick of butter) performed three dance routines for parade onlookers.

"You don't expect that from your lawyer," concedes Tatelbaum. "But it doesn't take away from my professionalism to throw in a little humor."

Tatelbaum's opportunity to learn professional clowning came after he won a substantial case for Macy's, and the

department store offered to send him and his wife to the Big Apple Circus Clown U. Tatelbaum jumped at this chance, not surprising for someone who changes his voice-mail every day to include not only his whereabouts, but a quirky "on this day in history" fun fact (the day we spoke commemorates the date when Vaseline was trademarked, he pointed out).

Tatelbaum has "always loved clowning around," he says, but at Clown U he learned the essentials of good clowning: making faces and strange noises, how to dress and do make-up, how to act silly, and how to approach a reluctant child or anyone who might be frightened of clowns ("Big smiles, and put your hands up in the air, sort of like high fives," he explains).

Since Thanksgiving, Tatelbaum has performed in several charity events for children, but he's also taken some of what he learned at Clown U back to the courtroom. Clown training, says Tatelbaum, has taught him another level of sensitivity, and in jury trials, for instance, he says, his clown training, "helps me relate to jurors more. It taught me how to read faces better."

Mostly, though, clowning allows Tatelbaum the particular sensation of bringing joy to people. "With what I do for a living, I never meet happy people," he says. "I represent creditors, people who have lost money. If I do my job, I bring them back to even, and they still have to pay me."

"At the parade or at an event," he continues, "people are already happy, and it's my job to make them happier. When you walk by 3.5 million people cheering you and calling out, 'You look like whole wheat toast!' or 'You look pretty rye!' there's no way to describe the high you get from it."

Tatelbaum and his wife are already planning for this year's parade when they'll go to New York a week early to prepare themselves by walking 10 miles a day (the 3½-mile parade route can stretch to five miles with all the crisscrossing across streets) and getting acclimated to the cooler weather.

"I love my work and I want to practice law for another 10 to 15 years," says Tatelbaum, who is 69. "But lawyering is my job; it's not my life. Clowning lets you know that an appropriate sense of humor at an appropriate time is good. It helps me stay away from being too serious." ■

Tatelbaum at the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade.

