Burton Young, of Young Berman Karpf & Gonzalez. Photo: J. Albert Diaz/ALM

PROFILE

'Having a Whale of a Time in Heaven': A

South Florida Lawyer Has Died

"May we carry on his passion for justice for all and protection of the rule of law," Said Judge Patricia Seitz about the passing of this long-time Miami attorney.

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10 minute read

Profile

Lisa Willis

A South Florida attorney who pioneered the practice of marital and family law and rallied against anti-semitism has died.

Burton Young celebrated his 96th birthday in August.

Since Sunday's announcement of his death, tributes to the beloved Young, Berman, Karpf & Karpf (YBKK) founding partner and past Florida Bar president have been pouring in.

Young was one of the first people in the country to make family law a separate practice area.

Miami-Dade Circuit Court

Until Burton Young came along, there was no body of law called standard law, said one Miami-Dade judge who is also Young's son-in-law.

Judge Scott M. Bernstein.

"He basically wrote the family law statute that we've adopted today," said Miami-Dade Circuit Court Judge Scott Bernstein. "It was his authorship with the members of the legislature. He wrote the bill, basically."

Those who knew Young well said his vision for a fairer justice system and his belief in the power of giving back will continue to inspire future generations.

Young's son, Miami Dade Circuit Court Judge David Young, said his father brought the Florida Bar to a new level: " He made it relevant."

Young and former Florida Gov. (1971 to 1979) Rubin Askew developed the judicial nominating procedure.

“ It was Dad’s strong feeling that politics and the judiciary, and I am quoting my father here, ‘be as far apart as heaven is from hell,’ David Young said.

A Mentor to Many

Judge David H. Young of the 11th Judicial Circuit of Florida. Courtesy photo

Burton Young was one of the most consequential lawyers in the history of Florida, said attorney Edward R. Blumberg of Deutsch Blumberg & Caballero, Miami.

“He counseled multiple Governors of Florida as well as members of the Bench on the State and Federal level. He mentored countless lawyers, including me, and his positive influence on all Floridians lives eternal," Blumberg said.

Young's son points to his father's keen sense of fairness.

"Dad was always concerned with the perception of fairness. In the administration of justice," David Young said. "He was always concerned that lawyers do everything they can to combat those forces within our society that want to take away judicial independence and lawyers should speak up when they see any injustice anywhere."

Young said failure to do so, "in his mind, meant you weren't the type of lawyer you should really be."

Philadelphia-born and Miami-raised, Young's achievements are numerous.

He became the first Jewish president of the Florida Bar and the president of the Florida Bar Foundation, for which he received the prestigious Medal of Honor Award.

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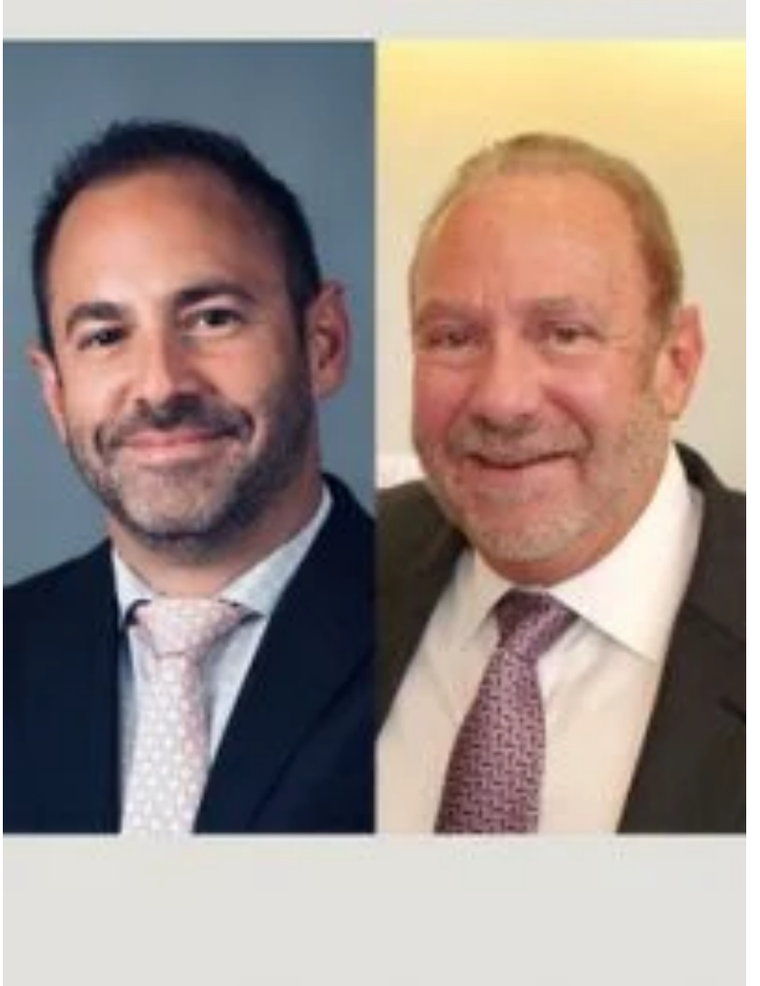
A testament to his character and dedication, Young was also a member of the Foundation's Legacy for Justice, continually supporting the organization through charitable acts, such as a gift annuity that directly benefitted the Foundation.

Under his leadership as president of the Foundation in the mid-1970s, he was instrumental in the creation of the Interest on Trust Accounts (IOTA) program in 1981, a pioneering initiative that channels interest earned on lawyers' trust monies to serve the public good, marking the first of its kind in the nation.

YBKK firm partner Mitchell K. Karpf said, "I would not be the lawyer that I am today but for him.

I ultimately became his law partner but we became much more than that. Burt was like a second father to me. He taught me so much not only about being a good lawyer but also to practice with the highest of ethics."



Brian and Mitchell Karpf of Young, Berman, Karpf and Karpf. Courtesy photos

Another YBKK partner, Brian Karpf, recalled a story from years back.

"When I was very young—roughly 12 years old—Burton invited me to spend a day off from school at the office with him. I was given several mundane tasks [reading files] to do for the day ... At the end of the day, Burton came back and sat with me and asked me about my day. He opened his wallet and gave me $20, and asked me to tell him my highlights of my work for the day. It was that moment I decided to become an attorney. And since then, I have done the same thing with my own children on take your child to work day."

Knowing the backstory, Brian Karpf said his kids still expect the $20.

"To this day, Burton would tell me that was the best $20 he ever spent," Karpf said.

"There is nobody that Burton could not become friends with. His smile, warmth, humor and love were infectious." Karpf said.

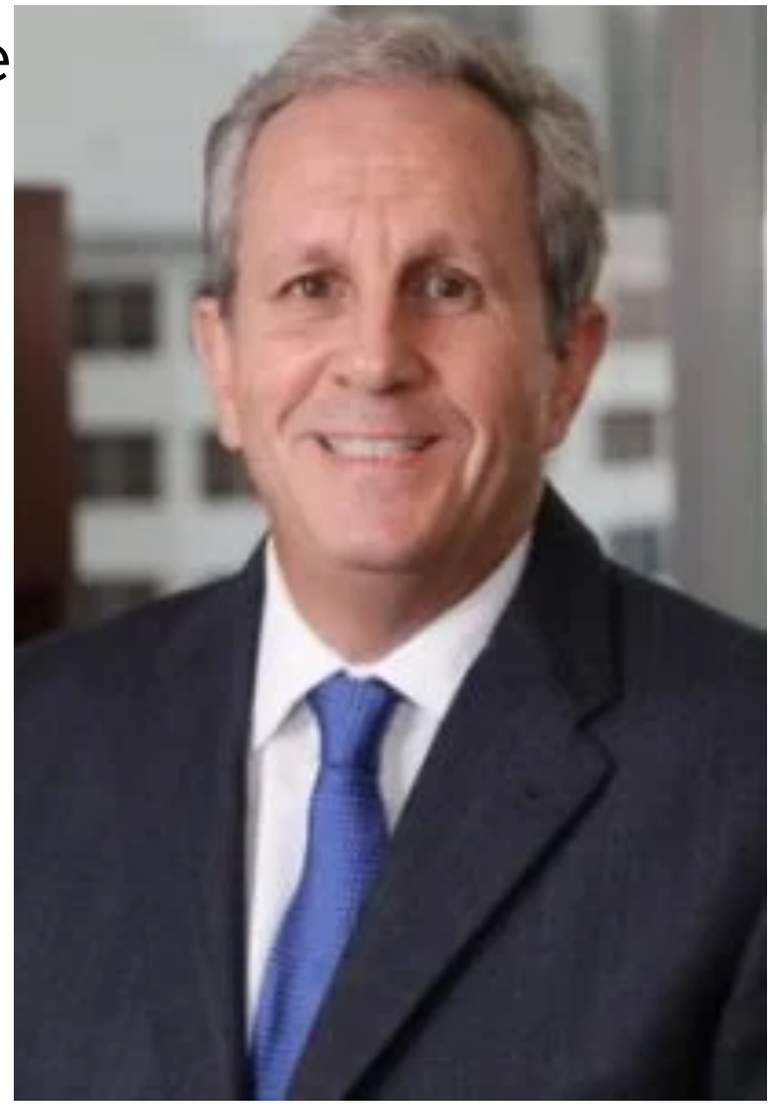
'Ostracized by the Board'

Fellow law partner Andrew S. Berman worked closely with Young at YBKK.

He recalls Young's early struggles with anti-semitism.

"Burton was the first Florida Bar president to not come from the ranks of the Board of Governors establishment," Berman said. "He was elected as an outsider who won a grassroots

campaign in 1969. He was ostracized by the Board for being an outsider and faced blatant antisemitism. His isolation by the Board was so acute that he almost quit, but to our great benefit was persuaded to remain."



Andrew S. Berman of Young Berman Karpf & Karpf

Berman said in recent years, Young
lamented how the nominating commissions have been dismantled and hoped that one day they would return to the model he helped create.

“His passion to improve the lives of Floridians never waned,” Berman said. “Even in his later years, he worked behind the scenes and reminded those in power of their obligations to continue fighting for justice. He was a true iconoclast who never stopped tilting at windmills. He touched generations of lawyers and judges and left an indelible legacy on the people of Florida.”

Young’s son also recalls his father’s struggles with being a trailblazer.

“He was really met with so much antisemitism,” David Young recalled. “He was a Jew from Miami. And it was a horrible situation. But my father worked hard, persevered and said, ‘By the end of my term, these people are gonna love me because they’re gonna see what I can do.’ And he did that. And he brought the Florida Bar to a new level.”

Turning Points

Raised in a working-class family, when Young’s family moved to Miami, a school field trip what is now the Liberty City, set a young 12 year-old future lawyer on a path to do good for others.

“what motivated him to do what he did every single day is … when they let the students off the bus shocked my father to his core," David Young recounts. "They saw shacks with no indoor plumbing and the teacher said, 'These are where your maids live, the people who cook your food, the people who take care of your parents, take care of your brothers and sisters.'"

Edward R. Blumberg partner with Deutsch Blumberg & Caballero. Courtesy photo

The teacher told the group she hoped that one day some of those students would do something to alleviate poverty and improve those people's lives.

It was a calling that always stuck with the senior Young.

“And that was a catalyst of my dad,” David Young said.

U.S. District Court Judge for the Southern District of Florida, Patricia Ann Seitz, said she will miss her dear friend very much.

“He has been an important part of my life, Seitz said.

“I was so blessed that Burton took me under his wing 34 years ago. He enjoyed breaking barriers which he did with great gusto when he ran for and was elected as the first Jewish

U.S. Senior District Judge

Florida Bar President."

Patricia A. Seitz. Photo: J. Albert Diaz/ALM

Seitz said Young had that "wonderful big smile, twinkling eye and joy of life," that was infectious.

"He was a great human being, justice warrior and courageous protector of the Constitution," Seitz said. "Burton most assuredly is having a whale of a time in Heaven."

Seitz hoped Young's passion for justice for all and protection of the rule of law carries on, "though nobody can do it with Burton's fervor or eloquence," she said.

Legend in the Florida Bar

Stephen Zack, a partner with Boies

Schiller Flexner in Miami, the first Hispanic president of the ABA, and past president of The Florida Bar, said Young was a legend in the Florida Bar.

Stephen N. Zack of Boies Schiller Flexner.

"He was always on the side of justice and fought against discrimination wherever he found it," Zack said.

Young's journey from a shy, withdrawn teenager to a luminous force in the legal field was nothing short of inspirational.

Another friend, Alan Dimond, a shareholder at Greenberg Traurig, shared his sentiments.

“We lost a great person who was a longtime leader of The Florida Bar and a gifted warrior for the rule of law, Dimond said.

The Young Academic

Young’s philanthropy extended to significant donations to the Children & Youth Law Clinic at the University of Miami, which aids in the representation of vulnerable children and youth.

University of Miami School of Law Assistant Dean for Alumni & Community Relations Georgina “Georgie” Alfonsin Angones knew Young well, academically and philanthropically.

“Burton Young was a UM Alumnus of Distinction, a legal legend and a mentor to countless lawyers,” Angones said. “He was generous and caring and admired and respected by everyone. Always had a kind word and a smile to share with friends. A true trailblazer who will be missed by all of us.”

Burton Young’s legacy is a beacon of hope and a reminder of the impact one individual can have on the world.

His vision for a fairer justice system and his belief in the power of giving back will continue to inspire future generations.

His unwavering commitment to justice and the betterment of society has left an indelible mark on those who had the privilege of knowing him and on the many lives he touched through his work and generosity.

Read the Florida Bar 2018 Interview Here

In summary of Burton Young's life, a fond, memorable quote came to his son's mind.

"He said everybody should make 25 people smile in a day," David Young said of his father.

Young is survived by his son, Judge David Young, and his husband, Judge Scott Bernstein; his daughter, Franci Leon and her husband, Scott Leon; his grandson, Jacob "Jake" Leon; his granddaughter, Madison "Madi" Leon; his longtime companion, Sonny Malnik, and many nieces and nephews.

Young's wife of 53 years, Sheila Young, died in 2008.

Funeral

Funeral services will be held at Temple Beth Am on Tuesday, April 2, at 5950 N. Kendall Drive, Pinecrest, 33156.

The suggested arrival time is 11 a.m. The service will promptly begin at 11:30 a.m.

In lieu of flowers, donations may be directed to the Burton Young Endowed Fellowship at the University of Miami School of Law.

Arrangements are by Levitt-Weinstein Blasberg-Rubin-Zilbert Memorial Chapel (305) 932-2700.

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