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## NONPROFIT NOTEBOOK

# HARC, Robinson & Cole Mark 25-Year Partnership

By Matthew Broderick

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A quarter-century ago, Robinson & Cole, one of Hartford's largest law firms, did something revolutionary that, in many respects, transformed the firm. It wasn't adding a new department or investing in new technology. It was piloting a new supported-employment program with HARC — a Hartford-based non-profit — to give people with intellectual disabilities a chance to work.

"In 1985, the job opportunities [for people with intellectual disabilities] were minimal; they could work in a kitchen or do maintenance"

explained Stephen Becker, president and CEO of HARC, whose organization has run supported employment since the early 1970s. "There needed to be more." That required new partnerships and new advocates — like David Hadden, now a senior partner at

Robinson & Cole, who's son, James (age 5 at the time) had intellectual disabilities.

"When we first piloted the program, a lot of the HARC clients would stay together [as a group] during the day," Hadden explained,

"but over time, they began to work more independently." Today, the HARC clients are a seamless part of Robinson & Cole's operations. And they hold many functions in the firm — under the support of an onsite job coach — from stocking supplies in the firm's conference rooms to filing and mailing client bills. They even have their own designated office space.

Overall, HARC has about 130 clients placed at more than two

dozen businesses under its supported employment program, including four at Robinson & Cole. Becker notes that for people with intellectual disabilities, work often takes on a heightened importance. "Our clients don't often celebrate life's

usual milestones like high school graduation, marriage, or having children," Becker explained. "They find value in work and the social inclusion of work."

And it's more than just the HARC clients who have benefited from the partnership with Robinson & Cole, according to Eric Daniels, a senior partner with the firm. "Being a lawyer can be stressful," Daniels said, "Having the HARC clients here — and seeing the contributions they make to the firm — provides a level of perspective."

It's a perspective that Hadden likes to share with his clients as well. "I will often go out of my way to introduce my clients to our HARC employees," Hadden said. "I think it really adds something to the client's day."

It's added something to Robinson & Cole as well. "When we talk about the firm as a team," said Daniels, "that includes our HARC employees. They are very much a part of our firm's family." This past November, Daniels and his wife, Pat, agreed to chair HARC's annual auction. The proceeds exceeded \$220,000, a record for HARC.

For Hadden, who was instrumental in getting the firm's HARC partnership off the ground a quarter century ago, the most satisfying part has been seeing the program — and the clients — succeed. Through the years, the firm has employed nearly 15 HARC clients, including one who worked there for 20 years.

"To watch this grow from something experimental to what it is today," Hadden said, "is very rewarding." For all involved, it seems. ■



Stephen Becker, president and CEO, HARC



David Hadden, senior partner, Robinson & Cole

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