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BY JEAN GRUSS | EDITOR/LEE-COLLIER

# Real Practice

Attorney Laird Lile created a resident-at-law program to transition law school graduates to the real world. The program has garnered some national attention.

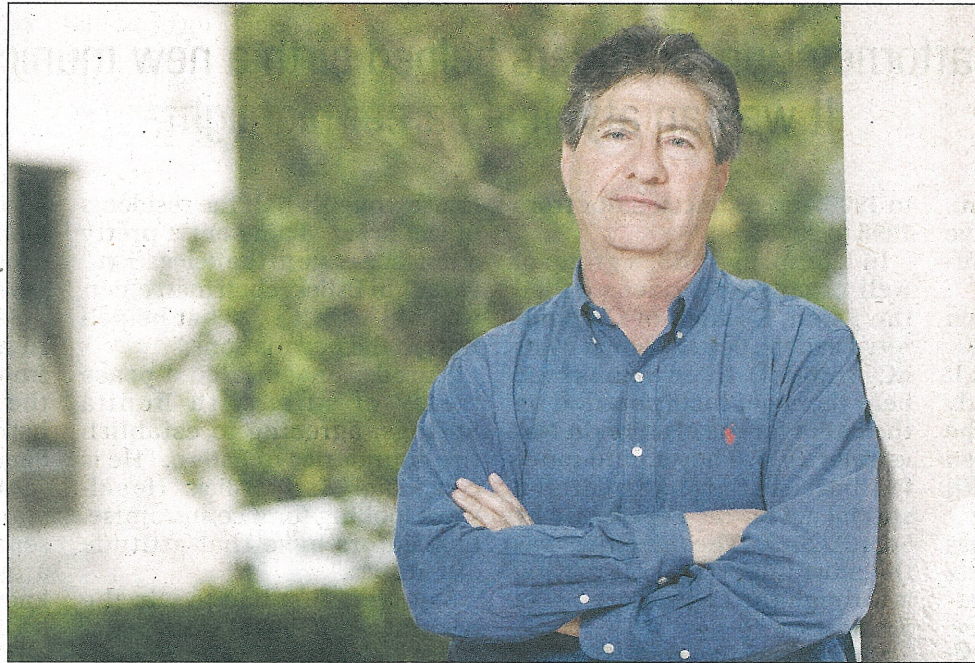
**M**edicine has a residency program for young doctors. Why don't lawyers have the same?

Laird Lile, a Naples trusts and estates attorney, wondered the same thing a few years ago when he looked for help to grow his solo practice. Surely such a program already existed, he reasoned. "I don't want to reinvent the wheel," he recalls.

But when he contacted law schools around the state, he discovered no one had started any such program. Usually, lawyers go straight from law school into practicing law without the kind of mentoring that is commonplace in the medical profession. "Nobody has institutionalized it," Lile says. "We let kids pass the bar exam and handle a murder case or a complex estate plan."

So in 2011, Lile created an 18-month, resident-at-law program at his firm. The program has already attracted attention from the profession, including articles in the ABA Journal and The Florida Bar News.

Law schools teach students how to think like lawyers, but the institutions don't adequately prepare students for the practical aspects of the profession, says Patrick Mize, Lile's first resident. That includes using government electronic filing systems or how to structure an agreement with a client. Mize is now an associate attorney in charge of the probate and trust department at Woods, Weidenmiller, Michetti & Rudnick in Naples. "They don't teach you how to run a business, and they don't teach you how to be an attorney," Mize says.



BRIAN TIETZ

**LAIRD LILE**, a trusts and estates attorney in Naples, launched a residency program for law school graduates to help them make the transition to the profession.

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**This isn't purely altruistic.** Laird Lile | attorney

Mize says learning from an experienced attorney is extremely valuable when starting out. "Any time you're under Laird, you learn a tremendous amount," says Mize, who remained an associate with Lile for another year and a half after his residency program

ended. "It put me ahead of where some people would be in a more traditional route."

Lile pays a resident \$4,000 a month, plus all fees for professional organizations and bar meetings. There are no minimum billable-hour requirements,

but the attorney is expected to work 50 to 60 hours a week. "I'm very demanding," Lile says. "I work them hard."

Lile says he decided on \$4,000 because that's the starting salary of a county attorney. Plus, Lile says it's important to encourage young lawyers to participate in industry gatherings and network with peers. There are four state meetings a year, usually in fancy resorts like the Ritz-Carlton, that can each cost as much as \$1,500 to attend.

Some young lawyers either can't afford to attend pricey gatherings or the pressures of billable hours prevent them from making time to go. "I took all that off the table," Lile says.

Lile says the program overall is a way to help young lawyers get a foothold in the business while still making his venture profitable. He reasons it would cost him as much or more for a skilled paralegal. Generally, a resident's work bills \$100 to \$200 an hour, depending on the complexity. Lile's own fee is \$550 an hour. "This isn't purely altruistic," he says. "I will make money off residents."

Lile says he picked 18 months for the duration of the program in part because it covers winter with its increase in seasonal residents and the important tax-filing season. "One year sounded too short, two years was too long," he says.

Mentoring a new attorney, says Lile, doesn't demand a lot of extra time. "What I'm mostly doing is verbally saying what I'm doing and they're going along for the ride," Lile says.

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