

Comfort Line

Spring/Summer 2020

Your Comfort is Our Business

An Interview With Hart & Iliff's Charles Brand

This interview with Charles Brand, the owner of Hart & Iliff, was conducted by Lorraine Cline. Lorraine is the principal of Cline Design, which has produced our newsletter for more than 20 years.

How is Hart & Iliff doing through this Covid-19 pandemic?

This has obviously been a difficult time for everyone. Since we provide essential services to our customers we felt it was important for us to keep operating. No matter what else happens in the world, people need to be warm in the winter and cool in the summer. We've done our best to keep our customers and our employees safe while continuing to provide these essential services. In the beginning, we had trouble obtaining the personal protective equipment we needed. But now we're well-stocked. Fortunately, all of our employees have stayed safe and healthy. With Whitney out on maternity leave (she had a girl) and Susan working from home, we've been short on office help which has made things a little challenging. Whitney's back now part-time, which is helping a lot.

What is the history of Hart & Iliff?

Hart & Iliff was formed in 1889 by Nathan Hart and Lewis Iliff, two brothers-in-law. Originally, the company sold feed grain, lumber, and coal. At some point Lewis Iliff bought out Nathan Hart. When Lewis Iliff retired, the company was run by his son, Charles Iliff, Sr., and later by his grandson Charles Iliff, Jr. In the 1930s, the company started selling liquid fuels and servicing heating and air-conditioning equipment. In 1971, Charles Iliff, Jr., sold the company to my parents, Albert and Florence Brand. Many of our old-time customers still remember my parents well. My father died in 1987 from lung cancer. My mother was struggling to run the business by herself and deal with my father's death at the same time. Since I'm an only child, it quickly became clear I either had to get involved in

the business or we had to sell it. In January 1988, I joined my mother to help run the business. We worked together for 12 years until my mother passed away in 2000.

You're an attorney and prior to joining your mother at Hart & Iliff you were practicing law. Was it a tough decision for you to give up your career to help your mother?

Yes, it was. I always thought that I would never work at Hart & Iliff, yet at the time, it seemed like the right thing to do, since my mother needed the structure of going to work every day.

Your family has owned Hart & Iliff for nearly 50 years. What are you most proud of?

My parents were the finest, most ethical people I've ever known. They always tried to do what was best for their customers. We've been able to continue that tradition. Customer satisfaction is very important to us. We are not perfect, and like everyone, we sometimes make mistakes. However, we stand behind our work and will bend over backwards to make things right. During this pandemic, I've been talking to customers more than I have in years. What I've found is that our customers really do recognize and appreciate the way we run our business.

What are your goals for Hart & Iliff for the future?

To hire the best employees, continue to provide our customers with outstanding service, and grow our customer base.

In addition to running Hart & Iliff, you're a partner in the law firm of Dolan & Dolan. How did you get back into law?

In October 1988, my mother and I went to a Newton Chamber of Commerce dinner meeting. My mother happened to sit next to Rick Hollyer, a partner at Dolan & Dolan. In the course of their conversation, my mother mentioned that I was an attorney, a CPA, had an MBA degree, and a graduate law degree (LLM) in taxation from NYU.

The next day Rick called and asked if I would have lunch with him. He asked me if I would be interested in coming to work at Dolan & Dolan. I said it wouldn't be possible because I was

working full-time at Hart & Iliff. He asked me if I would be willing to work part-time. That night I talked to my mother about it. We both thought that it would be a shame to let my legal education, knowledge, and experience go to waste. Obviously, it worked out well and I've been there ever since.

What type of law do you practice?

Taxation, wills, estate planning, estate administration, business law, and debtor creditor work, including bankruptcy and collection practice.

You once told me that Dolan & Dolan is almost as old as Hart & Iliff.

That's right. Dolan & Dolan was founded in 1908. I have no doubt that when Nathan Hart and Lewis Iliff needed legal advice that would call Dolan & Dolan.

How do you manage the two careers?

The simple answer is, by working 11 to 12 hours a day.



Charles Brand

Hart & Iliff

Fuel and Energy Systems

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4 Hampton Street • P.O. Box 591
Newton, N.J. 07860

T 973-383-1421 • F 973-383-1699

info@hartandiliff.com

www.hartandiliff.com

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