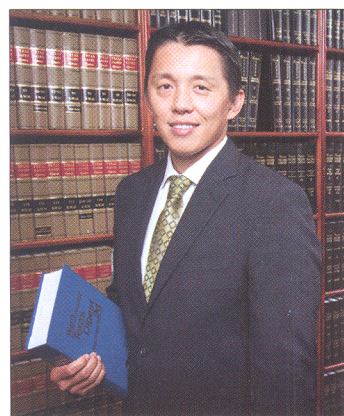


## Local lawyer uses education to create his own opportunities

BY KIRK DICKEY

**S**ITTING IN THE CONFERENCE ROOM on the 46th floor of the Bank of America Building with the Dallas skyline at his back, Richard Cheng seems like a man in his element. He has spent plenty of time in conference rooms just like this one, working through complex legal issues with clients or facing off against opposing counsel.

This conference room is different, though. This is his home turf at Shannon, Gracey, Ratliff and Miller, LLP, a respected Texas firm where he is a partner and the co-head of the firm's healthcare group. Relaxed in a plush chair at the long conference table, he is



Richard Cheng at Shannon, Gracey, Ratliff and Miller, LLP, where he is a partner.  
NICK YOUNG

thoughtful when asked what he enjoys about his work. "The thing that I love about my work is the opportunity to solve different types of problems," Cheng said. "Although the vast majority of my clients are healthcare and hospitalty-based, every problem has a different angle or a different fact pattern to it. It allows me to really dive in and help the client understand what their next steps are and to advise them accordingly."

Finding opportunities for his clients comes naturally for Cheng, who has spent his life creating them for himself. Now a lawyer with many awards and recognitions to his name, Cheng wasn't always on track to be a rising star in the Texas legal community.

Cheng said that his family discouraged his legal aspirations when he was younger, with his father going as far as telling him to find a different career, since no one would ever hire an Asian attorney. When a part-time job at Plano Rehabilitation Hospital introduced him to the world of occupational therapy, he pursued it as a career.

Cheng took a mix of classes at Collin College and The University of Texas at Dallas before finally earning an occupational therapy degree from Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center. While he enjoyed the work, the idea of becoming a lawyer was never far from his mind.

"I got to the point in my life that I realized I wanted to do what I wanted to do, even though I didn't receive a lot of support before," he said, adding that he saw going back to school as a strategic move. "By going to law school, I was able to create more windows of opportunity for myself. Whether I practiced law or whether I did something else that used the skills I learned in law school, either was great."

With his experience in healthcare operations and occupational therapy, healthcare law was a natural fit, and he has been working in the field ever since, as a lawyer, educator and executive. He helped establish a Texas office for a national law firm and has traveled extensively as counsel for healthcare clients.

"One of the most interesting things I have ever done was fly to China with one of my clients to negotiate a joint venture with a Chinese hospital system," he said. "It was a very interesting process


learning how they negotiate and learning the business practices in China."

Although it has been close to two decades since he went to Collin College, he looks back on the time there fondly. Many of the classes were in Wintermester and Maymester sessions, so they were concentrated courses over just a few weeks' time. That did not detract from the experience, though. He said he remembers a sociology course where he learned a lot about human interaction.

"That course helped me to understand people better and to learn how people function, how different human dynamics develop and why dynamics developed differently among different genders and different ethnicity groups," he said, recalling that the professor seemed very engaged with the students and the discussion. "The professor was very vivid and the class was very interactive."

Cheng also talked about the low cost of Collin's classes and how it was something he needed at the time. "Because it didn't cost very much, it allowed me to save those resources and use them to go on to occupational therapy school or set resources aside so that I could go to law school," he said.

He compared his Collin College experience to a stepping stone on the path through life, giving him some of the tools he needed for the challenges ahead of him, while also allowing him to prepare for them financially. "It's a much bigger name now, but one thing has remained consistent: The quality of education has always been high caliber."

Collin College recently revived its Wintermester session. Learn more at [collin.edu/gettingstarted/admissions](http://collin.edu/gettingstarted/admissions). 

*Kirk Dickey is a public relations writer with Collin College.*