Alum shares playbook on forensic accounting

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Harold Asher has spent nearly 50 years as a forensic accountant, investigating complex financial disputes and serving as an expert witness in high-profiles lawsuits. Now, he's bringing that experience back to the Freeman School as guest lecturer in a new undergraduate course in forensic accounting.

Harold Asher (A&S ’73, MBA ’75) lives for competition.

It makes sense for a former college football linebacker, and, it turns out, for a forensic accountant.

“I like the competitive nature of it,” says Asher, managing director of Asher-Meyers LLC, a Metairie-based firm specializing in forensic accounting and financial, economic and fraud investigation. “When you’re in a trial, you’re subjecting yourself to really smart people on the other side who are trying to knock you to the ground. I love that.”

Since earning his MBA from the Freeman School in 1975, Asher has spent nearly 50 years sparring with attorneys on behalf of clients involved in financial disagreements. He and his team of accountants and consultants are detectives of sorts, following the money to uncover financial misdeeds in a wide range of cases — from divorces, bankruptcies and contested valuations to fraud, theft and accounting malpractice.

“Wherever there is a situation involving a number that’s in dispute,” he says, “we have experience in dealing with it.”

He’s also a highly sought expert witness, testifying in a wide range of local, regional and national cases. It’s a process he likens to preparing for a football game.

“You’re working with attorneys who are developing a theory for the case — what it is we’re trying to prove — and once you determine that, then you set out a game plan — how do we get there,” he says. “Mostly, it’s about being prepared. I’m not anywhere near the smartest man in the room, but no one will work harder than our team to try to get the outcome our clients want.”

A native of Bogalusa, Louisiana, Asher arrived at Tulane in 1969 on a football scholarship. After playing four years — including on Tulane’s 1970 “Year of the Green” Liberty Bowl-winning team — he graduated with a biology degree and then stayed on to get his MBA, with concentrations in finance and accounting.

“I started working for Price Waterhouse in 1975, and literally within three days I knew it wasn’t the right fit for me,” he says. “But I stayed there for three years.”

Asher joined a New Orleans CPA firm after leaving Price Waterhouse, but within a year he and a partner decided to start their own accounting firm.

“I sold my car for $750 and bought a desk, a chair and a calculator,” he recalls. “Failure was not an option.”

There was just one problem: They had no clients.

“If you’re going to be an entrepreneur, you have to be a salesperson,” he says. “So we would identify people we wanted to do business with and, even though they didn’t know us, call them up, invite them to lunch and ask them to give us a chance.”

Asher’s big break came almost immediately, in 1980, when he met Max Nathan (L ’60), the legendary New Orleans attorney and Tulane Law School professor.

“For reasons I do not know, he took a liking to us and started referring clients to us,” Asher says. “That was the impetus for our growth. If it weren’t for Max Nathan, I don’t know what would have happened. Max became my mentor, and I give him all the credit for any success I’ve had in my career.”

Based in large part on Nathan’s referrals, Asher began to take on more litigation work, and he soon discovered that this new area of practice appealed to him.

“I didn’t find traditional accounting work to be intellectually stimulating or challenging,” he says. “I liked the competitive nature of forensic work, the litigation side of it, and I liked representing clients and seeing them get favorable outcomes.”

Over the course of his career, Asher has participated in dozens of high-profile cases, testifying for both plaintiffs and defendants in cases involving accounting malpractice, personal injury damages, business valuations, investment disputes and fraud investigations. In 2022, he helped win an acquittal for New Orleans District Attorney Jason Williams in his federal tax fraud case, and he’s currently working with the state of Louisiana on a class action lawsuit filed against former Gov. John Bel Edwards over restrictions on bars implemented during the COVID-19 pandemic.



Asher's reputation in the field ultimately led the Freeman School's Cathy Gray Duesbery to reach out to him. Duesbery, professor of practice in accounting, was preparing to teach a new course in forensic accounting, and she wanted it to have a real-world component. After doing a search for forensic accountants in New Orleans, she discovered Asher and asked if he'd be interested in participating.

"It was a no-brainer," Asher says. "I love what I do, and I've always enjoyed the teaching component of my job. If I can tell people about our profession and show them some of the professional opportunities available, that's something I would like to do."

Duesbery initially asked Asher to be a one-time guest lecturer, but he told her he could do better. He ended up becoming essentially a co-instructor, guest lecturing, running mock trials, and sharing his expertise and experience with students.

"We transformed Harold's real-life legal work into case studies," Duesbery explains. "The students participated in mock trials with Harold serving both as judge and the opposing attorney."

“I grilled them,” Asher laughs. “I wanted them to know not only how to prepare a report, which is often the easiest part, but also how to defend it in a trial, so I gave them a sample of what I get when I testify. At first, they didn’t know what to expect, but by the end, they were handling themselves very, very well.”

“The students loved Harold,” Duesbery says. “He really became the face of the course.”

The class, one of Freeman’s first accounting courses to featuring a significant experiential learning component, was so successful that Asher and Duesbery are planning to offer it again this spring, giving a new group of students the chance to take on Asher in a mock trial.

Giving back to his alma mater is nothing new for Asher. In 2022, he was instrumental in the effort to recognize John Washington, Charlie Hall, Robert Johnson and Charles Ennis, who in 1972 broke the color barrier and became Tulane football’s first Black student athletes.

“Not only were they super athletes, individuals, friends and teammates, but they were also trailblazers,” Asher says. “Without them, Tulane’s football program would not be what it is today,”

Thanks in part to Asher’s efforts, Washington, Hall, Johnson and Ennis were honored in Yulman Stadium with a commemorative plaque telling their stories.

While honoring Tulane trailblazers and helping to teach a new generation of accountants may be different, Asher says they’re both rooted in the same place.

“I'm very much aware of the commitment I have to support my university,” he says. “Having a Tulane education and the opportunities that arose from that education have served me well throughout my professional life. I feel an obligation to pay it forward.”