

# Prosecutor of Ryan, Sorich taking new job

Asst. U.S. Attorney Collins: 'I've given it all I've got'

BY NATASHA KORECKI  
Federal Courts Reporter

While dining at the world-famous Charlie Trotter's restaurant, he sat down and asked for a cheeseburger.

Stunned, the chef came out of the kitchen to see who would place such a humdrum order.

It was Patrick Collins, a star prosecutor in the U.S. attorney's office in Chicago.

"I'm not a guy for fancy food," Collins said.

That might sum up Collins, who in his 12 years as a prosecutor often went up against the elite, took down the powerful, but kept his feet on the ground, colleagues said.

Collins, the lead prosecutor in the conviction of former Gov. George Ryan, announced Thursday he will join the Chicago office of Perkins Coie LLP, based in Seattle. Collins will join as a partner in the firm at the end of this month.

"I've had a wonderful ride. I'm sad to leave, there's no doubt," he said. "I've given it all I've got."

## '28 years' worth of work'

Collins, 42, helped lead the Operation Safe Road investigation, which took dozens of unqualified truckers off the highways and exposed widespread corruption in driver's licensing facilities. Last year, he led two complex, high-profile trials that ran back to back: those of Ryan and of Mayor Daley's patronage chief, Robert Sorich.

"Patrick is as close as you come to irreplaceable," U.S. Attorney Patrick Fitzgerald said. "He's very smart, very dedicated, very hardworking, and he just knows how to make a case."

"He's worked here for 12 years. He's probably done 28 years' worth of work."

The decision to make the switch to the private sector was a struggle for Collins. He won over trial juries with a sincere, down-to-earth but meticulous style.

He argued his cases alternately with light humor and zeal. He once told a nun who took the witness stand it was every Catholic schoolboy's dream to cross-examine her, leaving jurors chuckling.

## MAJOR CASES

During Patrick Collins' tenure in the U.S. attorney's office, he helped lead some of the highest-profile investigations in Chicago:

◆ **Operation Safe Road:** 75 convictions, including former Gov. George Ryan, businessman Lawrence Warner and Ryan's chief of staff Scott Fawell.

◆ **Hired Truck:** 38 convictions, including city Water Department chief Donald Tomczak and city Clerk James Easki.

◆ **City Hall hiring scandal:** Mayor Daley patronage chief Robert Sorich and three others convicted at trial last year. Probe continues.

◆ **In 12 years,** Collins tried 20 cases, leading 16 of them.

In closing arguments for the Ryan trial, Collins exploded with raw anger over what he called layers of hidden corruption in the secretary of state's office.

"He doesn't try to be someone he's not," Fitzgerald said. "He's just himself, Patrick Collins. I think juries see that. He's very genuine."

Collins, who also headed the successful Hired Truck probe and the continuing investigation into City Hall hiring, said 2006 took its toll.

"My family's been through the wringer. This last year was probably more than I should have done," said Collins, a father of three.

The Ryan and Sorich sentencing hearings were probably the toughest part of his job, he said. "I've never liked sending people to jail. That stuff wears on me."

## Money only one factor

While other law firms tried to court Collins and his prized trial expertise, he chose Perkins Coie, he said, because of the kind of work the firm has accomplished, including that on behalf of Guantanamo detainees. For the last five years, Fortune magazine has rated Perkins Coie one of the 100 best companies.

Collins, who has a strong charitable side, having founded Horizons for Youth, a

not-for-profit youth group, said he'll do some pro bono work at the firm. The Chicago native will primarily handle complex commercial litigation, and internal investigations for corporations like Starbucks.

"Patrick is one of the best trial lawyers in the country," Chicago managing partner Christopher Wilson said.

Collins said money was a factor in his departure, but not the only reason. The average U.S. prosecutor makes less than \$150,000. New law firm associates make \$145,000, and top partner salaries can reach the multiple millions, said Kareni Hoppe, legal consultant with Credentia Inc.

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Assistant U.S. Attorney Patrick Collins, shown last July 6, will join the Chicago office of a Seattle-based law firm at the end of March. —RICHARD A. CHAPMAN/SUN-TIMES