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LOCAL INSIGHT

Father/Son Team Finding Debt Relief A Growth Field

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If there were officially doctors for people and businesses struggling with mounting debt, Anthony and David Parent might be considered tax MDs.

The father and son attorneys graduated together from The Quinnipiac University School of Law's class of 2002. Six years ago, they opened up their own firm, IRS Medic Parent & Parent LLP, in a three-story Wallingford home from the 1800s. The firm dedicates its practice to helping severely indebted people confront the most powerful collection agency in the world — the IRS. It started with two staff members and a couple of clients. Today, it consists of six employees and nearly 120 cases.

"We are nothing like the debt settlement agencies and so-called tax relief companies," explains Anthony Parent. "We are real tax attorneys who know how to build a favorable case, research relevant law, think creatively and present a reasonable agreement that the IRS will accept. And if we think the IRS did not follow their own regulations, then we can take their case to U.S. Tax Court."

The core of their business, the Parents said, are people who have had good jobs and for various reasons have become over-extended, often to the verge of bankruptcy.

"What we find is a lot of people who used to make a lot of money ran up big tax liabilities. Even though they live in this really nice house, it's under water. There's no money. They can't refinance," Anthony Parent said, noting it's important clients are realistic and understand that by hiring a lawyer their tax



PHOTO/JOANNA SMILEY

David Parent, seated, and his son Anthony started IRS Medic together six years ago.

debt won't simply disappear.

Though it may be difficult to imagine that Anthony and David Parent receive payments from clients who have depleted all of their money, they say they're able to get paid by asking for a flat fee up front. It also helps that

their clients, says Anthony Parent, in the heat of a debt crisis "find resources that they didn't even know they had available to them." He does admit that now more than ever before,

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he's seeing clients who are "fully strapped" — meaning, they've cashed out 401ks, home refinancing, and any and all other credit.

"The typical situation is that they ask to borrow money from a family member or even a boss that they were afraid to ask. And the great thing about these clients who borrowed money for our fee is that they are incredibly motivated to solve their problem. They don't want to let down the person who they borrowed money from. Additionally, the best time to negotiate a deal with a client is typically when they are in the worst financial shape," Anthony Parent said.

It was Anthony Parent who came up with the name IRS Medic, which he felt suited the firm because not only do the attorneys consider themselves to be the medics of tax law, David Parent used to work as a medic in the U.S. Navy. He also spent over a decade working for the City of New Haven as an accountant, where he realized he had a passion for- and in depth understanding

of-bureaucratic tax procedures.

"I find it inherently interesting," said David Parent.

It was through David Parent's connections in the industry, along with extensive advertising, that the business began to grow. Growth didn't happen overnight, though, Anthony Parent said it was when he realized he needed to treat the firm as a service business that it took off. He put himself in a client's shoes and asked: 'Why you should hire us?' Then came up with the answer: 'Because we're going to get your life back and save you money.'

Most of the time, Anthony Parent says, he's able to save clients money or get them on track with a payment arrangement.

"What I see in this economy is a lot of people in Connecticut who are still living in denial about their rapidly worsening condition," Anthony Parent said. "They are still paying for things, somewhat luxurious items, leased cars, landscaping, a timeshare that

they can't afford. One of the primary, huge ticket items is private college tuition for their children. Parents are completely wiping out any chance at retirement, incurring huge early withdrawal penalties on their retirement accounts with the IRS, just so that their kids can stay in college. Going to a less expensive school or waiting a few years until things improve not even considered. When trying to dig out of a bad situation, it is important that every expenditure be looked at as possibly expendable. Now is not the time to be rigid or attempt to impress your neighbors." For about 35 of the firm's clients, bankruptcy is a real option.

"Sometimes there's a disconnect because people are so overwhelmed with their debt. But some people walk in our offices and say 'I need you now,'" Anthony Parent said. ■

Joanna Smiley writes the weekly Local Insight column. Reach her at jsmiley@HartfordBusiness.com.