

# County attorney passionate on protecting community

people have to put sports aside. All the time you spend on sports, after your twenties, you're done."

A dislocated knee cap is what he has to show for his years playing football. "On the other hand, for what you get out of playing an instrument — it's with you the rest of your life," he says.

His oldest son played baritone, but gave it up to sing in the choir. Clara has a very good ear, and Natty, is four, and so far has shown to be a good candidate for the drums. Mr. Lambert joked.

Besides, the symphony, Mr. Lambert and his wife, Cathy, are both very involved in community service activities. "We very much believe in it," Mr. Lambert says. He is the second vice president of the Kiwanis, past president of Hearts and Homes, and served on the board of the Boys and Girls Club.

And soon there will be the next election, where Mr. Lambert will have to run for his position. It's something he's looking forward to — the competition again.

"Dad was a big influence on me," he says, "and Mom is as much a fighter." But there's something deeper, truer, than just winning for Mr. Lambert. It's a sense of what he's fighting for.

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"This is all the cases we have and the people assigned to them," Mr. Lambert turns page after page. "If Susan Swimley is working on one thing, she isn't working on something else."

It isn't just the similarities of his position to his dad's — Mr. Lambert's father instilled in his son a keen sense of competition.

That's what got him to stay in law. He went to college for political science but found the graduate schools were too expensive, so he sort of found himself in law school.

"I had no intention of going into law," Mr. Lambert remembers. "I played in the symphony (violin) and was a very mediocre computer programmer."

Once he discovered the high tuitions of the good political science schools, he went into law.

"But right away, I went to work as an intern for the Missoula city attorney and the county attorney," he says. "I was immediately drawn to trial work. It was the competitive part. There's so much on the line at a trial. I always enjoyed the competition."

Mr. Lambert says he always played sports, he almost had to, with a coach for a dad. Since he was 10, he's played the violin — that's 32 years.

"Mom and Dad were very supportive," he says. "The neat thing about music, versus sports, is that eventually most

says, lifting his glasses and rubbing the bridge of his nose. Keith "Dobbie" Lambert was the head basketball coach at MSU from 1955 to 62. Before that he was an assistant coach at Kansas State under Jack Gardner. "When he became head coach, his perspective really changed. That's what I'm going through now."

Besides the 11 employees Mr. Lambert is responsible for, he has to rethink his job.

"Before, I pretty much spent most of my time on felony cases," Mr. Lambert says. "Now, I'm responsible for all the contracts and land use issues. I sit on the 9-1-1 administration board. As county attorney I'm responsible for pursuing all the bad checks, all the misdemeanors committed outside the city limits, and I'm spending more time with the civil cases."

Mr. Lambert, as county attorney, represents all the planning boards, and the zoning districts, the fire districts and the school districts.

As an administrator, his job is to see that all the work gets done.

"I see everything now as a resource," Mr. Lambert says. "I think, how is this going to get done? I see all the time we spend as an allocation of precious resources."

He heaves his battered leather briefcase onto his lap, and takes out a grid sheet.

By Michele Corriel  
Independent Press staff writer

Marty Lambert rushes into his office from his bi-weekly meeting with the county commissioners. He hangs his jacket on the back of the door and hurries around for a cup of coffee.

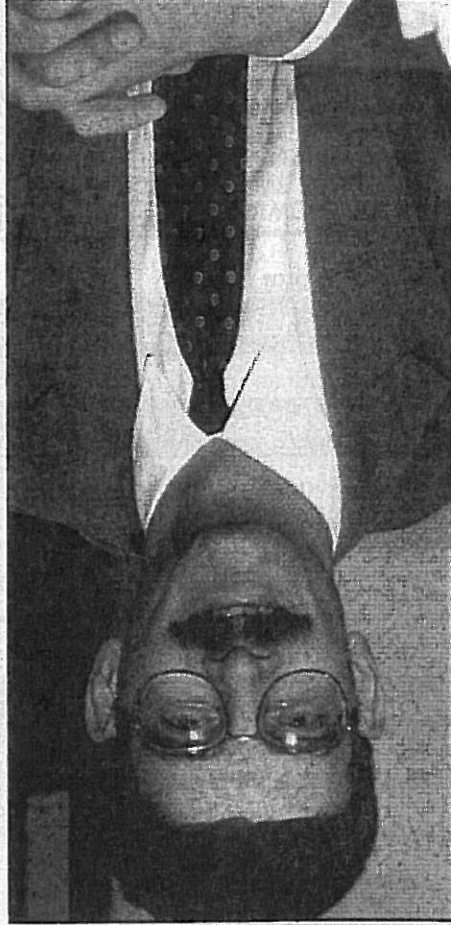
Outside his door, a pencil drawing portrait of himself, as done by his daughter Clara, 8, is thumbtacked up. "This is you," it says, with the title of *Space Invader* written over the top.

Becoming the county attorney didn't just fall into Mr. Lambert's lap, when Mike Salvagni won the judgeship in January. He did it the hard way — he earned it, with 14 years as a deputy county attorney. The last nine years he served as chief deputy.

Although Mr. Lambert's office is crowded with law books and stacks of folders, he also keeps of photographs of his three children, Ben, 11, Clara, and Nathaniel, 4. Plants are scattered along the windowsill.

But present most of all are the things you can't see: his violin — he plays first chair violin in the Bozeman Symphony — for example, and the looming presence of his dad, Dobbie Lambert.

"I think about him a lot, since I've become county attorney," Mr. Lambert



Jessie Close/Independent Press

County Attorney Marty Lambert

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# Lambert

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"Especially in criminal cases, we're talking about the protection of the community," he says, his face intent. "The protection of the individual rights of a person versus the liberty of the defendant."

"I very much enjoy that atmosphere," Mr. Lambert continues. "Some people don't like the pressure. I find it very challenging, professionally. I'm not afraid of it. I get nervous, and probably always will — that's human. But I will not compromise my position or the people of the community. It's not recklessness, but determination. If you're going to try the

case, then by golly, so be it."

Not only does Mr. Lambert believe in himself and his own standards, but he strongly believes in the office he holds.

"What really bothers me is the way some people look at the county attorney's office," he says. "People say, 'You need a little trial experience under your belt — go to the county attorney's office. Then get out and make some money.' That bothers me."

The people are entitled to have as good a legal representation, as those people with the money to spend.

"There is no higher calling than to be a county attorney," Mr. Lambert says.