

Attorney makes house calls

CHATHAM (AP) — Doctors won't do it. Cross most veterinarians off the list, too. Even the milkman doesn't make house calls any more.

But one Chatham lawyer thinks taking services to the people isn't passe yet.

Jackson Donley, who has been doing business house to house in Sangamon County for five years, says he would hate to be confined to one office.

Donley has a full-time job as a tax attorney with the state Department of Revenue. In his off hours, though, he travels, writing wills and giving clients legal advice on such issues as real estate, business and personal injuries.

"Call me a throwback, but if (house calls) worked for my granddad (a veterinarian), ... I think it still works today," Donley said. "It made him a lot of friends and got him through the Depression, even if he was paid in chickens and garden produce."

Donley prefers being paid by check — although he has been offered a motorcycle and Chicago Cubs tickets as reimbursement — but going to customers just feels natural.

A stately office, a three-piece suit and a leather chair doesn't make a lawyer better or the work more legal, Donley said. What those symbols do mean are higher prices for customers.

"A lot of people feel the more money they pay, the better the job will be," Donley said. "They will get charged more, but I can get them just as willed without the higher price."

Donley doesn't have the overhead of an office, secretary and

the trappings that go with them. His wife, Julia does all of his typing, and he charges \$45 an hour to do his client's legal work in their homes.

Plus, his evening and weekend work hours are convenient for customers.

Konnice Comerford said she knew for eight years that she needed a will but didn't want to take a day off work to go to a lawyer's office.

"When Dad said this lawyer comes to the house, I said, 'For God sakes, let's do it,'" Comerford said.

Donley started making house calls in his spare time for elderly relatives and friends. Those calls worked so well he started offering them to all of his clients.

"It's easier for people to deal with death in their own home, where they feel comfortable," he said.

"Plus, if they need to get their papers, they're right there in the next room. That can save them a lot of second trips."

The convenience has persuaded many people to make wills who wouldn't have, Donley said.

"Most people think unless they have an estate they don't need a will. But anyone with a child under 18 needs a will saying who'll be the child's guardian," he said.

"One lady called me who wanted a will done. When I told her I'd come over to her house the next evening, she asked incredulously, 'Is that legal?'"

"I get that response a lot, but once I show them my (business) card — another symbol — they don't say anything else," Donley said.

