Alumnus Seeks Just Compensation for Clients

FIRM: MITCHELL, HOFFMAN & WOLF LLC, Chicago
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ATTORNEYS: Ken Hoffman, JD '91, with J. Wesley Mitchell and Paul P. Wolf

AREAS OF PRACTICE: Personal Injury, Medical Malpractice, and Wrongful Death Litigation

YEAR FOUNDED: 1998

BRIEF BACKGROUND: Ken Hoffman’s firm is dedicated to representing individuals injured through the negligent conduct of others. The firm handles cases involving automobile and trucking negligence, workplace accidents, medical malpractice, police misconduct or use of excessive force, and wrongful death. The firm is proud to have obtained a number of multimillion-dollar settlements and jury verdicts on behalf of its clients.

Q: Why did you decide to practice in a small firm?
A: I really enjoy the autonomy that a small firm provides. Decisions can be made over a quick cup of coffee or lunch rather than trying to gather a big group together who may be in different cities.

Q: Why did you choose your particular area of practice?
A: The idea of helping out people as opposed to a large corporation really appealed to me. In the personal injury field, we are often the first and maybe only attorney who that particular client has ever had working to help him or her.

Q: What aspects of your education at Washington University prepared you for your career?
A: I attribute much of my success as a lawyer to simply asking, “Why?” While I was in law school, I remember repeatedly watching Professors Michael Greenfield and Frank Miller stump students with that powerful one-word question, which I later learned to ask myself. My time at Washington University also clearly showed me that I wanted to become a trial attorney. I honed my advocacy skills as a finalist in the Wiley Rutledge Moot Court Competition and while representing the law school at the regional competition in Omaha, Nebraska. Overall, Washington University instilled in me both a professional skill set and the confidence needed to be a successful trial lawyer.

Q: What advice would you have for someone interested in pursuing this area of law?
A: Nobody ever became a great trial lawyer sitting at a desk answering discovery requests for a senior partner. You need to find an opportunity to get into the courtroom and work on your courtroom skills. Trial work is like playing a sport or an instrument; you only can improve if you practice.

Q: What has been the most rewarding aspect of your practice or a case you have handled?
A: The most rewarding part of the practice is when you tell the client about a result whether a verdict or settlement that you realize will change the quality of his or her life for the better. Often our clients have suffered serious injuries and their lives have not been the same for a period of time. The satisfaction of knowing that you helped make a difference is really hard to describe.

For example, several of my recent multimillion-dollar cases come to mind. In one, I obtained a $6.25 million settlement for a family whose 4-year-old son had suffered brain damage at birth. In another, I was able to obtain a $3.3 million verdict for my client who had suffered a paralyzed arm in a motorcycle accident with a police car, after I proved the officer’s conduct was reckless. The most memorable such instance, however, was probably a jury verdict I obtained of $9.9 million in a wrongful death case. The award benefited the surviving three minor children of a mother who died following childbirth, as a result of the obstetrical staff’s failure to recognize clear signs of preeclampsia during her pregnancy. While no amount of money can replace the loss of your mother, the verdict assured that the children would have all their future care needs met.

Q: What have you and your wife, Julie Comer Hoffman, JD ’89, done to stay in touch with your alma mater?
A: We have tried hard to keep in touch with many of our classmates and stay apprised of all developments at the school. We also recently took our two high school age children down to St. Louis for a visit and showed them the campus.