

Winning formula

Lawyer developed successful strategy very early on

By TOM KIRVAN
Legal News

Craig Lubben, managing member of the Miller Johnson law firm for the past three years, has enjoyed his share of courtroom success over a legal career spanning 40 years, so much so that it has offered him somewhat of a Yogi Berra type perspective on the joy of victory and the agony of defeat.

"I've won and I've lost, and I can say quite unequivocally that winning is better," Lubben said with a wry smile.

He discovered as much early in his career when he was the lead attorney defending a major corporate client in a wrongful discharge and employment discrimination case that arose after the company fired an employee involved in a fight at work.

"The plaintiff said he was fired principally because he was an immigrant and therefore was discriminated against," said Lubben of the case heard by a jury in a Kalamazoo court.

"The stakes were high, as the plaintiff was seeking to have his job back, in addition to back pay and punitive damages. In short, a lot was on the line for the company."

A fact that wasn't lost on company's CEO, according to Lubben.

"He asked me, rather directly I might add, 'Can you win this?' I knew there was only one answer he wanted to hear," said Lubben.

The jury reaffirmed Lubben's answer with a verdict in favor of the company, providing an early boost to a young lawyer's legal career.

"Generally speaking, there's no substitute for winning," said Lubben, even if he believes that winning need not come at someone else's expense every time.

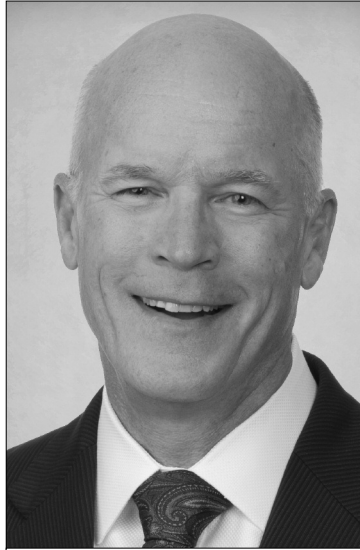
Lubben, who grew up on the south side of Chicago in a neighborhood undergoing transition at the time, learned from one of the best trial lawyers in the state, longtime Miller Johnson attorney Jon March.

"He has been my mentor since I clerked for Miller Johnson after my second year of law school in 1980 and has remained so since I joined the firm full-time in 1981," Lubben said of March, a former managing partner who is now Of Counsel with the Grand Rapids-based firm.

March, in turn, became one of Lubben's chief admirers over the course of their respective careers with Miller Johnson.

"One of the most rewarding aspects of my legal career has been to observe a younger lawyer whom I have mentored develop into a lawyer whose skills surpass my own. Craig Lubben is a prime example," said March.

"Craig joined Miller Johnson in 1981 fresh out of Northwestern Law School, and early in his career he worked with me on many litigation matters," March said of his former mentee. "His assistance to me was enormous. There are some people who just 'get' being a lawyer, who meet the highest standards of knowledge, judgment, and personality, but more importantly have the skill to put that all together to effectively counsel and advocate. Craig is one of those people. At the request of the firm, Craig moved to Kalamazoo to



Craig Lubben

help anchor our office there, and he developed his own caseload, with younger lawyers now helping him. But if I had a tough case, or a difficult decision, Craig was always the first person with whom I would consult. His judgment was unerring."

Such praise for Lubben doesn't end there, according to March.

"Craig is an outstanding zealous advocate, but he manages to achieve his excellent results while maintaining the highest degree of civility to adverse parties and counsel," March added. "In our firm's litigation associate training sessions, we would often use Craig's deposition transcripts to illustrate how to professionally defuse an obstreperous adversary.

"In addition to being a great trial lawyer, he has also been a leader in our law firm," March said of Lubben. "He has just completed a term as Managing

Member, helping successfully guide the firm through the unprecedented challenges of 2020. If you are looking for the highest example of professionalism, look no further than Craig Lubben."

An alumnus of Calvin University in Grand Rapids, Lubben acknowledged that the past year has been "difficult," as the firm grappled with the economic uncertainties surrounding the pandemic, which prompted the need to furlough some 18 members of the legal support staff.

"Anytime there are layoffs, it is especially important to communicate fully with every member of our team, whether they are a partner, an associate, or are with the support staff," said Lubben. "Without that kind of transparency, there likely will be confusion, uncertainty, and fear about what lies ahead."

A forthright approach in such circumstances is a lesson that Lubben may well have learned from his late father, George, who served as in-house counsel for a company in Chicago that included a union and white-collar work force.

"He was responsible for negotiating contracts with the union and knew the importance of treating everyone with respect," Lubben said of his father, a Loyola University School of Law grad who also was a U.S. Army vet.

"He knew the value of making sure each voice was heard."

Lubben and his wife, Lois, met while students at Calvin and were married after his first year of law school at Northwestern. The couple has four children: Christina, a lawyer in Milwau-

kee who earned her juris doctor from Marquette University; Brian, a software developer for Amazon in Seattle; Eric, an accountant with Universal Forest Products in Grand Rapids; and Kaitlin, a social media specialist for Trinity Christian College in the Chicago suburb of Palos Heights.

Each Lubben child is a graduate of Calvin, where the family patriarch has served on the Board of Trustees since 2011, including a five-year stint as chairman from 2015-20.

"I've always been fascinated by higher education, and the challenges that colleges face in developing programs that prepare students for their career choices," said Lubben, who majored in economics and political science at the private university that is affiliated with the Christian Reformed Church.

"It's becoming increasingly challenging as colleges adapt to online learning and the prospects of declining enrollment."

For students faced with daunting job prospects in the age of the pandemic, Lubben could very well suggest that they look to Kalamazoo for inspiration.

"It's a very entrepreneurial community," Lubben says of Kalamazoo, where he has worked and resided since 1986. "It's where Checker Cab got its start and where Shakespeare Rod & Reel was born. Not many people know that Gibson Guitars was originally a Kalamazoo company, as, of course, was Upjohn and Stryker. It's a place where any number of entrepreneurs have made it happen."

Office of the Environmental Justice Public Advocate launches website to highlight actions toward justice

The Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy's (EGLE) Office of the Environmental Justice Public Advocate recently launched a website to better connect Michigan residents with the state's work toward ensuring equity and environmental justice.

The site, Michigan.gov/EnvironmentalJustice, highlights ongoing environmental justice projects and initiatives, community partnerships, and ways for the public to interact with the office. It also offers information on the state's Interagency Environmental Justice Response Team, inaugural Michigan Advisory Council on Environmental Justice, as well as Tribal Relations, and EGLE's nondiscrimination, public participation and tribal consultation policies. EGLE's newly developed Limited English Proficiency plan is also available on the site in English, Arabic, and Spanish.

"Action is at the heart of environmental justice advocacy. The role of the Office of the



Regina Strong

Environmental Justice Public Advocate is to work collaboratively within state government and with the community to move toward ensuring environmental justice in the state," said Regina Strong, Environmental Justice Public Advocate. "This new website is designed to provide a window into how we are moving the needle."

Michigan defines environ-

mental justice as the equitable treatment and meaningful involvement of all people – regardless of race, color, national origin, ability or income – and is critical to the development and application of laws, regulations and policies that affect the environment, as well as the places people live, work, play, worship and learn.

The Office of the Environmental Justice Public Advocate was created by Governor Gretchen Whitmer's Executive Order 2019-06 to serve as an external and internal advocate and catalyst for ensuring environmental justice throughout the state. The Office operates as a Type I agency within EGLE, with a direct line to the Governor's office to elevate concerns and coordinate across state government.

The Office also works to address and resolve environmental justice concerns and complaints and advance environmental justice and equity in Michigan.

Tucker named partner at Sinas Dramis

Sinas Dramis Law Firm welcomed new partner Catherine (Katie) E. Tucker, in January. She represents plaintiffs in personal injury cases throughout Michigan, and joins George T. Sinas, Michael E. Larkin, James F. Graves, Bryan J. Waldman, Stephen H. Sinas, and Thomas G. Sinas as a firm shareholder.

Tucker has been with Sinas Dramis Law Firm since 2016, representing plaintiffs in personal injury cases including auto accidents, wrongful death claims, and more. She also leads the firm's no-fault medical provider practice group, successfully pursuing claims and recovering hundreds of thousands of dollars on behalf of medical providers for unpaid treatment rendered to auto accident victims across the State.

Tucker is a Board Member and President of the Women Lawyers Association of Michigan, Mid-Michigan Chapter (WLAM) and a Past President of the Ingham County Bar



Katie Tucker

Association, Young Lawyers Section. In 2019, Michigan Lawyers Weekly named her an "Up and Coming" lawyer and was named a "Top 40 Under 40" by the National Trial Lawyers.

The firm also welcomed Brian A. McKenna as a new partner. He has been with Sinas Dramis Law Firm since 2018 and opened the firm's fifth office in Saint Clair Shores.

Sinas Dramis Law Firm is headquartered in Lansing, and has offices in Grand Rapids, Saint Clair Shores, and Kalamazoo, as well as Chicago.

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