

One of a kind

Lawyers share the secret to niche practice

Business of Law

By Carol Lundberg

Sometimes, less is more.

Lawyers who have developed a niche practice could tell you that focusing on a very specialized area of the law — particularly if it's one that few other lawyers practice — can pay off and make you the go-to lawyer in the state. Or the country, for that matter.

But does it take a huge leap of faith, or penchant for gambling on your abilities to attract clients to embark on such a venture?

Sometimes, it does, said Michael J. Zwick, a lawyer who in 2003 shut down his solo practice to become a partner, and later president, at Assets International LLC, a Southfield firm that tracks down missing heirs and beneficiaries, and helps them claim their cash.

But other times, there is no other choice but to take up a very small niche and concentrate solely on serving a very specific client, said Michael H. Fabian, who 25 years ago founded Fabian, Sklar & King PC, which exclusively represents policy holders and plaintiffs in fire and explosion cases.

To spot trends and identify niche clients, you have to be nimble and quick, as Michael D. Crow, partner at Secret Wardle Lynch Hampton Truex & Morley, PC, said when he describes how he quickly became an expert in bed bug cases.

You have to be willing to put in a lot of hours with no immediate payoff, explained Julie I. Fershtman of Foster, Swift, Collins & Smith, P.C., when she recalls her early days in equine law.

And you have to know your industry better than anyone else, as Holli Hart Targan tells how years of industry involvement led to her successful electronic banking practice at Jaffe Raitt Heuer & Weiss, P.C.

Read all their stories and their secrets of success, as we take a look at what it takes to be “One of a kind.”



Michael D. Crow

**Bed bug lawyer,
Secret Wardle Lynch Hampton Truex &
Morley, PC, Farmington Hills**

When Michael D. Crow, executive partner and group chair of the governmental litigation practice group at Secret Wardle, talks about a blood-sucking vermin and pest, he's not talking about an opponent. He's talking about one of the fastest growing practice areas in the law — bed bug cases.

Michigan's first jury trial in a bed bug case, *Justine Bolton v. East Side Transition Center*, concluded Jan. 10, and Crow won a no-cause verdict in Wayne County Circuit Court for his client, the building owner.

Getting into bed bug law required Crow to act, and learn, quickly to get out in front of what one of his expert witnesses called the “the single biggest pest problem to face our society in over a generation,” Crow said.

“About a year and a half ago, it became clear to me that this would be a huge problem in Detroit,” he said. “So we learned all we could about bed bugs and how the law applies, and started writing papers about it.”

The firm put together an exhaustive advisory article for clients, including insurance carriers, to advise them of the impending wave of bed bug litigation.

The reason that bed bug litigation is growing so quickly, even though before a couple of years ago the country hadn't seen bed bugs in 50 years, is that “we've changed the pesticides we use and how we use them, for safety reasons. Now the bed bugs are resistant to the chemicals we use to get rid of them. Add to that increased travel around the world.”

Following the advisory the firm sent to clients, Secret Wardle also hosted a webinar about bed bug litigation.

The firm has since taken some 15 bed bug litigation cases, representing property owners, insurers, and Section 8 landlords and private-pay landlords.

Then he started getting invitations to be a guest speaker at industry events, like the Griffin Pest Solutions seminar in September in Kalamazoo.

Bed bug litigation is still just a sliver of Crow's practice, 80 percent of which is defense-side commercial litigation, but he expects that it could be more.

“We saw it as a huge growth area,” Crow said. “And it's going to get bigger.”