

Finding a niche: Lawyers settle into specialties

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Termite troubles

The “termite belt” has become Pete Cardillo’s territory.

The Tampa lawyer specializes in representing plaintiffs with fraud and other problems involving termite exterminators, including big names such as Orkin. The solo practitioner, who has become known as the Bug Lawyer, often has around 50 active cases along with several dozen perspective clients.

Cardillo has learned that Central Florida is “ground zero” for subterranean termites in what he calls the termite belt of the country. Part of his expertise comes from subscribing to and reading pest control trade journals.

His clients include condominiums, apartment complex owners, property managers and developers. The largest settlement he has won so far in a case against an exterminating company is \$2.75 million.

Cardillo has recovered more than that for a single client. In one case involving termite-damaged property, he recovered \$2 million from Orkin and \$1.8 million from **Allstate Insurance**.

He probably knows as much or more than most exterminators about termite behavior and biology from working with entomologists.

“This is all I do,” Cardillo said. “I’m in constant conversation about termites.”

The conversation extends to his Hyde Park home, which is nearly 100 years old. He realized he had a lifetime contract with an exterminating company that had never done a full treatment and so forced the company to treat the house.

“Then I figured out from their own records that they had screwed up the treatment,” Cardillo said. “I made them come back and do it right.”

After death rights

An exploding body in a mausoleum. Dozens of babies’ bodies dug up in an irrigation project. Cremains used as kitty litter.

These ghoulish situations highlight several cases Clearwater lawyer Tom Carey has handled in his funeral home and cemetery malpractice niche, what he calls a “sub practice” in his personal injury practice at **Carey Leisure & Magazine**.

“I really love these cases,” he said. “They are very interesting.”

Carey believes there is only one other lawyer in Florida who has a specialty in funeral home and cemetery malpractice. One reason is the law.

A plaintiff’s attorney has to prove conduct in such cases is “quasi-intentional,” which Carey said is very tricky and vital since insurance carriers only cover negligence.

The grief and emotional turmoil plaintiffs in such cases endure is one of the reasons he continues the special practice. Many of the cases end in settlements.

The settlement conference in the Babyland case lasted 22 hours.

The mid-1990s case involved Royal Palm Cemetery in St. Petersburg where an area known as Babyland was partially unearthed during an

irrigation project. Some infants' remains were lost, and some were discarded in dumpsters.

Carey had 256 clients in that case.

“My first client was a woman in her 80s who visited her baby’s grave once a month,” he said. “Some of these babies were buried a long time ago, and they thought when they dug them up no one would notice what happened. They were wrong. Mothers were still going back 30 years later.”

The Liquor Lawyer

Prohibition died long ago, but Grace Yang occasionally receives calls from people criticizing her for supporting “a sin industry.”

Yang, a shareholder at GrayRobinson in Tampa, realizes she is known as the liquor lawyer and tries to be philosophical about such calls. She tells callers — who are mostly women — that alcohol is a legal, highly regulated product.

The regulation means a lot of business for her specialty, which includes alcohol beverage laws for vendors and the hospitality industry, land use issues related to alcohol, alcohol tax issues and licensing.

“I think I’ve established a little niche,” Yang said. “It has become a fun and interesting practice.”

She has been part of GrayRobinson’s alcohol industry team since 2005 and is a familiar face at area government hearings related to her clients and their businesses.

“This is an industry that employs a lot of people and generates a ton of tax revenue,” Yang said. “We have some pretty high-end clients.”

Her practice specialty is mainly the result of serendipity. As she was finishing **Cornell University** Law School, she pretty much ruled out certain types of practices. She did not want to do litigation and liked real estate and administrative law.

Yang was recruited in 1997 by lawyer Richard Blau to work in a liquor law practice group being formed at **Holland & Knight** in Tampa, which would allow her to participate in the types of work she liked.

Today, she and Blau practice together at GrayRobinson.

“It wasn’t like I went to law school and thought I would be a liquor lawyer,” Yang said. “I tell people Blau sucked me into it.”

Indian affairs

One of the more unusual arrows in Jack Gordon’s quiver of civil trial weapons is his knowledge of Seminole Indian litigation.

Gordon, a partner and civil litigation expert at Maney Gordon PA in Tampa, believes he has handled more cases against the tribe than any other lawyer.

“Nobody sues them because they have sovereign immunity, but I’ve been chipping away at it,” he said. “It’s truly an academic argument. Philosophically and academically, it’s a great challenge.”

Gordon has about half a dozen open cases involving complaints against the tribe. The majority is negligence and security cases.

He relishes the challenge of dealing in cases with an Indian nation that declared itself a tribe in the 1950s, taking pride in being a tribe that was not conquered. The hitch is that sovereign immunity was given to conquered tribes, making them wards of the state, to protect them, Gordon said.

Congress probably will abrogate the tribe's immunity in the future, he said, but for right now, litigating cases against the Seminoles is "a pet project of sorts."

"We're merely litigating the issue of immunity," Gordon said. "More often than not, the Seminoles try to do the right thing. We settle some out of court."

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