

JIM SPIROS

East Central Injury Lawyer Reaches Results through Relationships

by Bethany Krajelis

CHAMPAIGN—If you see James D. Spiros at a restaurant for lunch, you probably won't spot him sitting alone.

"I try to never go to lunch alone," says Spiros, the founding partner of **Spiros Law**, a six-year-old personal injury and medical practice law firm with offices in Champaign, Danville, and Kankakee.

As a person who enjoys talking and being in social settings, he clearly loves the company. But, as a trial lawyer who focuses his practice almost exclusively on medical malpractice and personal injury cases, Spiros also sees the benefit in breaking bread with lawyers who sit on both sides of the courtroom.

"I tell all the lawyers that work in our office, 'Try not to ever go to lunch alone,'" he says. "I always tell them, 'If you're taking depositions,

refer cases to me and I've represented many defense attorneys' family and friends. And personally, that is the ultimate compliment."

Kankakee attorney J. Dennis Marek is one of the many attorneys who have referred cases to Spiros over the years.

Spiros is professional, reasonable and is a clean fighter, a trio of characteristics that makes him a true pleasure to work with him, says Marek, of Ackman, Marek, Meyer Boyd Ltd .

"I think reputation gets you referrals and he has a good one," Marek says. "He's wise beyond his years."

Earning a Name for Himself

Matthew T. Gubbins routinely handles workers' compensation cases for Sacks, Gubbins & Regas in Kankakee and has sent

was injured in a motor vehicle accident Spiros' way. He recalls thinking that the case wouldn't result in a significant award.

"I had very little contact with that case, and the next thing I know, he told me the final result, and I thought it was staggering sum for what seemed like a lot for a minor car accident," Gubbins says. "I remember talking to my assistant and saying, 'Do you remember that minor motor vehicle case? Look at what he's done with it!'"

Gubbins says that type of result "seems to happen a lot with him." Maybe it's Spiros' intelligence, preparedness or personable ways that make him so successful; to put it simply, Spiros "is very good at what he does," Gubbins says.

And if the results Spiros has reached over the past decade are any indication of his success, Gubbins is right.

Back in 2005, Spiros secured a \$9.8 million verdict for his client, the second highest jury verdict in Vermillion County history. A few years later, he led his clients to a \$3.3 million settlement with a Champaign County Hospital. Last year, he secured the largest settlement ever reported in Ford County.

But, it's not just about the money for Spiros as his desire to develop relationships extends past the legal community and into his client base.

With a practice that focuses almost exclusively on personal injury and medical malpractice matters, the clients he represents often bring a lot of emotions to the case. That, he says, makes him want to secure a verdict for them even more.

"There are a lot of emotions involved when someone's life has been catastrophically changed," he says. "Essentially, all you can do is try to bring back some dignity for your clients and say, 'Hey, everything is going to be all right.' That's hard to do sometimes."

It might be difficult, but that's where Spiros' work ethic comes into play.

A few years ago, Spiros took on a tough medical malpractice case in Iroquois County. His client had been misdiagnosed and didn't have much time.

"Ultimately, there wasn't a great deal of time to obtain a result while she was still able to



invite the other attorney to lunch. If you're not working on a case with them or even if they're not practicing in our areas, still invite them out."

For Spiros, developing relationships is one piece of solving the puzzle of practicing law. He not only has a knack for it, but he's also used the quality to build his practice.

"Sixty to seventy percent of my cases are referred to me by other attorneys," Spiros says. "I have a lot of defense attorneys who

cases that fall out of his area of expertise to Spiros for almost a decade.

"I don't hesitate when the right case comes across my desk to refer it to Jim," Gubbins says. "It's almost automatic."

While he hasn't seen Spiros in action, Gubbins has seen his results. In fact, he says all of the clients he has referred to Spiros have always been "extremely pleased."

A few years ago, Gubbins sent a man who

appreciate the result so I literally had to put many other matters on hold while we fast tracked that case,” Spiros said. “It was really important to me that we get a quick result.”

After only a couple of months in a case that typically would have taken more than a year, Spiros reached a \$1 million settlement for his client. Price tag aside, Spiros says “it was very rewarding that we were able to bring that result to her while there was still quality of life remaining.”

Working Hard for Results

Spiros’ success didn’t happen overnight. He worked years to get to where he is today, a journey his parents played a big role in.

Spiros, 42, grew up on the Southwest side of Chicago, the child of immigrants who ran a few Greek restaurants. At a relatively young age, Spiros’ parents had him washing dishes.

“What was instilled in me was if I didn’t go to school and get an education, I’d be there when I grew up,” Spiros says, explaining that like many other immigrants, his parents stressed the importance of education.

Not only did Spiros grow up wanting to go to college, but by age 10, he knew he would go to law school one day.

“Wanting to become a lawyer is something that has been part of my life as long as I can remember,” he says. “I’m a people person. I enjoy talking. I enjoy being in social settings. Being a lawyer is always what I wanted to do.”

Working toward that goal, Spiros interned at the Cook County State’s Attorney’s office during a summer break from Purdue University in West LaFayette, Ind., where he was studying criminology.

“I didn’t quite realize the impact it would have on me,” Spiros says. “In watching attorneys try cases at that young age, I really saw the difference that representation could make.”

Although that internship convinced him that criminal law wasn’t for him, it galvanized his desire to join the legal profession. After

graduating earning his undergraduate degree in 1990, Spiros took a job with an industrial fencing contractor to save up enough money to go to law school.

A year later, he enrolled in The John Marshall Law School. After interning for the prosecutor’s office in college, Spiros wanted to get a taste of the other side, so he clerked for a large insurance defense firm.

Like his internship at the state’s attorney’s office, Spiros’ clerkship with the defense firm changed his course to becoming a lawyer. That clerkship, Spiros says, made him realize he wanted more client interaction, something he thought he would find at a plaintiff’s firm.

When he graduated from law school in 1994, Spiros took a job with the Central Illinois law firm formerly known as Manion, Janov & Devens, which focused on plaintiff’s personal injury cases. Spiros’ practice eventually narrowed to personal injury and medical malpractice cases.

After more than a decade at the firm, Spiros and his colleague, Karen E. Wall, left to start their own firm. They opened offices in Danville and Kankakee in 2005 and added a Champaign office a few years ago. Earlier this year, Wall was appointed to the Vermillion County bench, a move that forced her to leave the firm that focuses on personal injury, medical malpractice, and workers’ compensation cases.

The firm handles cases from Will County to Champaign County and everywhere in between. It’s not uncommon for his attorneys to be in five or six different counties on a regular basis. Needless to say, it’s a practice area that puts Spiros on the road frequently.

When he’s not busy working, Spiros enjoys going hunting, fishing, lobster diving, and anything outdoors with his wife, Stephanie, and their twin 11-year-old boys, Alex and Evan.

Taking a Unique Approach

As a defense attorney in Heyl Royster Voelker & Allen’s Urbana office, James C.

Kearns has been going up against Spiros for about 15 years. “It’s a pleasure,” he says, to have Spiros as his opposing counsel.

“I say that because he’s good and straight forward and you don’t have to worry about any BS,” says Kearns. “If you ask for something, you get it. He’s easy to get along with and reasonable to deal with.”

Kearns pointed to Spiros’ knack for handling mediation as one of his strong suits.

“If you have a guy who knows how to evaluate a case and is good with clients, he’s easy to mediate with and that’s how it is with Jim,” Kearns says

Spiros says he’s had to adjust in recent years, as there the legal community has experienced a trend toward mediation and arbitration.

“We take a unique approach,” Spiros says of how his firm handles arbitration and mediation. “We will go forward as though we are going to a jury trial.”

They’ll bring exhibits, prepare computer animations, blow up photographs and present videotaped presentations of depositions, Spiros says.

“Whether you’re at trial or mediation or arbitration, you’re going to have to do the work. We just go ahead and do it in advance,” he says. “It’s not uncommon for us to spend \$10,000 on a computer animation of a client’s multiple surgical procedures in preparation for mediation because ultimately if it falls apart, we already have that piece of the puzzle put together.”

Not only does his firm use technology to prepare for its cases, but it’s proven useful in explaining complex medical issues to the jurors. His firm also routinely utilizes so-called “day-in-the-life” films that show a routine day of his client’s life to provide jurors a glimpse into the impact of the injury.

“It’s one thing to read about the injury, but it’s another to see an animation of it,” he says. “It helps show the true value of your client’s case.” ■