

## Area lawyer leading plaintiff's Inner Circle

Published in the print edition and on the Internet on 8/13/2012



Q&A talks to attorney Michael Koskoff about his involvement with the Inner Circle of Advocates. He is senior partner at the law firm of Koskoff, Koskoff & Bieder PC in Bridgeport.

**Q: The Inner Circle of Advocates recently celebrated its 40th anniversary. What is the group and what does it do?**

A: The Inner Circle of advocates has been referred to as the "elite of the plaintiff's bar." Essentially it is a think tank for plaintiffs' trial lawyers. Membership nationally limited to no more than 100 trial lawyers who represent plaintiffs in suits against manufacturers of dangerous products, health care providers and others. Membership criteria require our members to have tried at least 50 lawsuits before juries and to have recovered multiple verdicts of seven, eight or nine figures. Our purpose is to share ideas and develop new ones so we can better represent our clients.

**Q: One of the requirements for membership in the group is high grades by both judges and opposing counsel. How are these grades determined? How is the data collected?**

A: Data is collected by a membership committee of the organization. The committee requires candid recommendation letters from judges who have presided at trials conducted by the applicant and by opposing counsel. Lists of completed trials are also reviewed as are recommendations by current members. The attorneys are always well known amongst members of the bar in the state where they practice. Frequently they have a national reputation such as our deceased member Johnnie Cochran, current member Morris Dees, the leader of the Southern Poverty Law Center, and others. Most members have lectured extensively to bar groups and many have written books and article on trial practice.

**Q: How did you become involved in this group and become president? What trials set you apart to earn membership?**

A: I assume I was invited to submit an application because of a body of work that stretched back to the 1970's when I was involved in representing defendants in the Black Panther trials in New Haven. Following that, I handled cases integrating the police and fire departments in Bridgeport and New Haven. I also sued national drug companies for women who developed cancer from the drug, DES. I had numerous verdicts in excess of \$1 million, the first wrongful death verdict in excess of \$1 million, the first verdict in excess of \$10 million and the first verdict in excess of \$20 million. I have lectured in more than 30 states and three foreign countries. I assume all of that body of work contributed to my invitation to join. I assume I was elected president because the organization has confidence that I

will continue to promote the policies of the group and create an atmosphere of sharing and trust that are the goals of membership.

**Q: Plaintiff attorneys, like yourself, have this reputation that is negative. Yet, as you point out, your members have taken on the automobile industry, governments, the pharmaceutical and health care industries, as well as both foreign and domestic manufacturers of dangerous products. Why can't plaintiff attorneys get any respect?**

A: From the earliest times, lawyers who take on the establishment have had a bad reputation. Special interest groups have control over the media and have the ability to shape opinions against their enemies. Lawyers are often made the scapegoats for the ills of society. Of course, there are a few “bad apples” and they help to shape that negative opinion. No one likes to see lawyer’s pandering for cases on park benches. That ruins the reputation of the large number of lawyers who work hard to get justice for their clients. There are also well financed groups like the Chamber of Commerce who spend millions of dollars each year for the sole purpose of defaming plaintiffs’ lawyers. In spite of all of this, people who are injured due to the fault of a dangerous product or a negligent trucking company see us as their only hope for a decent life. The respect that we get is from these individuals and the satisfaction that we get is from being able to salvage these broken lives. Good plaintiffs’ lawyers are extremely proud of the work that they do and the respect that we get from our clients and their families is more than ample.

**Q: You describe the Inner Circle as a think tank for plaintiff attorneys. What are some of the ideas that may have changed the practice of the plaintiff bar from your get togethers?**

A: All of the meetings of the Circle are closed and we work under what may be called the “Las Vegas Rule” — what happens in the Circle, stays in the Circle. I am not permitted to reveal these confidences. However, one example of a lawsuit that had its genesis in the Inner Circle was the suit against the cigarette companies to recover damages for states. It was a direct result of discussions by Inner Circle members.