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Richard Bieder: ‘unintimidatable’ in the courtroom, champion of children, dies at 80

Daniel Tepfer Jan. 20, 2021



Attorney Richard Bieder of Koskoff, Koskoff & Bieder of Bridgeport, during a 2002 press conference after he and other attorneys representing 70 Connecticut municipalities filed a class action lawsuit in Hartford Superior Court seeking to recover more than \$220 million lost when a

loan to Enron went bad. The suit named more than four dozen defendants including then-Conn. Gov. John G. Rowland, CRRA officials and former Enron officials. Photo: Peter Hvizdak /

Nationally known lawyer Richard Bieder, 80, who died last week after a long illness, was a complex personality.

“In the courtroom, he was unintimidatable, if that’s a word,” said James Horwitz, one of his partners in the Bridgeport law firm Koskoff, Koskoff and Bieder. “But outside the courtroom, no matter how busy he was, he would drop everything to help with a problem.”

Horwitz said that Bieder not only knew the name of every staff member who worked in their large office, but he knew the names of their children and in some cases, grandchildren.

“He made everyone around him feel important,” said Horwitz.

In his 51 years with the Bridgeport law firm, Bieder is credited with many courtroom successes. He represented victims and families from the April 24, 1987, L’Ambiance Plaza building collapse in Bridgeport; the New Year’s Eve 1986 Dupont Plaza Hotel fire in San Juan, Puerto Rico, that killed 97 people; families of the 186 people killed in the Oklahoma City bombing on April 19, 1995, and the more than 5,000 investors bilked by the Colonial Realty of Hartford in 1990.

But despite his successes, Bieder eschewed traveling around in luxury cars and instead drove a 10-passenger van.

“I need it to drive the grandchildren around,” he once told a reporter.

Bieder was a formidable figure in the courtroom with his salt and pepper hair pulled back in a small ponytail.

His final arguments before juries in accident cases in Bridgeport became legendary.

Standing before the jury, Bieder would fumble around in his jacket pocket and pull out a well-worn pocket watch.

This had been his grandfather’s watch, he told the jurors. It used to run perfectly until one day the watch got dropped.



1 of 3 Franklyn Reid's Family, left to right, Pearlylyn (Mom), Dwight (Dad) and brother Wayne Reid and civil attorney Richard Bieder talk to the press outside the Litchfield County Court House after Scott Smith no contest in the death of Reid. March 2003 Photo: Carol Kaliff / Hearst Connecticut Media



2 of 3 Richard Bieder, lawyer for the Reid family, points his hand to the neck of Joel Faxon, an associate of his at the law firm Koskoff, Koskoff & Beider, to demonstrate where Franklyn Reid was fatally shot by a New Milford police officer, during a press conference at the Bistro in New Milford in 2012. Photo: File Photo / File Photo



3of3 Attorney Richard Bieder of Koskoff, Koskoff & Bieder of Bridgeport and William M. Bloss of Jacobs, Grudberg, Belt and Dow of New Haven, after a press conference they held announcing that they and other attorneys representing 70 Connecticut municipalities filed a class action lawsuit in Hartford Superior Court seeking to recover more than \$220 Photo: Peter Hvizdak /

Bieder told the jurors the watch had been taken to a jeweler who managed to get it working again.

“But it never worked as well as it had,” he concluded, adding that was also the case with his injured client.

Outside the courtroom, Bieder worked to raise money for many charitable organizations including the Bridgeport Rescue Mission.

Bieder received several awards, among them a citation from the Connecticut Legislature and the Stamford branch of the NAACP. The Fairfield County branch of Mothers Against Drunk Driving praised him for outstanding legal effort, dedication and support for a case that overturned Connecticut law by making persons who served liquor to minors liable in negligence suits.

He was co-founder of the Connecticut Child Justice Foundation that provided free representation for children in the Department of Children and Families custody.

Bieder was born in Stamford Sept. 26, 1940, to parents Ida Kopferschmidt and Irving Bieder. He graduated from the University of Pennsylvania’s Wharton School of Finance in 1962 and New

York University Law School in 1965. From 1965-68, he served as a lieutenant in the United States Navy's Judge Advocate General Corps., ultimately stationed at the Naval Air Station in Subic Bay, the Philippines. After the Navy, Bieder returned to Connecticut to begin his career as a trial lawyer. He joined the firm headed by Ted Koskoff in Bridgeport in 1969.

He met his late wife Bonnie, a social worker, at the firm's annual holiday party.

Survivors include a son, Erik Bieder of Norwalk; a daughter, Julie Robson of Surf City, N.C.; a sister, Joan Bieder of Kensington, CA.; sister-in-law Linda McCarthy of Branford; five grandchildren and two great-grandsons.

Due to Covid-19, there will be no funeral services and the burial will be private. A memorial service will be held at a future date.