

PROFILE IN BRIEF

BY TARYN HARTMAN
Legal News

Brian McKeen *Civil Servant*



Brian
McKeen

Civil justice is something Detroit attorney Brian McKeen takes pretty seriously.

The words appear directly below "McKeen & Associates" on the mahogany walls of the firm's office in the Penobscot Building downtown.

McKeen is a member of the executive board of the Michigan Association of Justice and sits on

the board of governors of the American Association for Justice, constantly working for tort reform on the state and national levels and always on the lookout for "pro-civil justice candidates" for office, he says.

He chairs the Professional Negligence Section and serves as co-chair of the Birth Trauma Litigation Group for the AAJ, and the walls of McKeen's own office, overlooking Belle Isle, Windsor and the Ambassador Bridge on three sides, are filled with plaques and accolades attesting to this commitment.

And he's now the only attorney listed as specializing in civil justice matters in the ranks of the Inner Circle of Advocates, an invitation-only society of the 100 top plaintiff attorneys in the country. McKeen was inducted into the Inner Circle in August.

"It's a wonderful organization where the members share information," McKeen says of the Inner Circle, which exists as a place for members, who McKeen says have achieved the highest levels of success in the legal profession, to pool their experiences and resources in preparing one another for trial.

"They have a saying that if you go to trial against a member of the Inner Circle, you go to trial against the entire Inner Circle," McKeen continues.

Taking on the Inner Circle means going up against a community that's accrued billions of dollars in judgments. To be considered for membership in the Inner Circle, a lawyer must have a minimum of 50 personal injury trials under his or her belt plus at least three verdicts topping \$1 million or one ten-million-dollar verdict. Lawrence Charfoos, Richard Goodman and A. Robert Zeff are also listed as local members of the Inner Circle.

The Central Michigan University graduate developed an initial interest in victim's rights while clerking in the late Robert Anderson's Oakland County Circuit courtroom as a student at Cooley Law School.

"I was intrigued by how there was an unwillingness on the part of some of these care providers" - whom McKeen points out are intelligent, well-educated, and all administered an oath to first do no harm - "to accept responsibility" in cases of medical malpractice or other personal injury cases, he says.

Watching family members of those who were injured or killed seek some form of justice also profoundly impacted McKeen.

"It never replaces the lost loved one and it doesn't take away the injury," McKeen says of compensation following a tragedy, but he does believe it can give victims and their families some semblance of stability and comfort.

Over the course of his career McKeen has taken on health systems and other corporate giants to the tune of \$16 million, \$22.5 million, and even \$55 million in three separate settlements, topping the list of Michigan's biggest judgments four times in the last eight years.

But talking with McKeen, however, it's clear his work is not about the money. Instead, he's in it for people's rights to trial by jury, the rights afforded people by his most heralded principle - civil justice.