

# Michael Koskoff

THE LAWYER AS INSTRUMENT FOR SOCIAL CHANGE

BY FRANK PAGANI

“If you are a lawyer, you are helping to mold the rights of individuals for generations to come.” That is a quote by the late and legendary trial lawyer Theodore I. Koskoff, the founding partner of Bridgeport-based Koskoff Koskoff & Bieder P.C.

The words not only became part of the credo for the nationally known 78-year-old legal firm, but also inspired his son, Michael, to enrich his father’s legacy.

“I am so lucky to have been born into the legal profession and, having had the unique opportunity, to emulate my father who instilled in me the importance of giving back to society,” Koskoff said. He added: “I also learned by working with him that an attorney could be a force for social change.”

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When asked to recall an accomplishment from his remarkable, 48-year career of which he is most proud, he was quick to cite two that came early in his career.

The first was the work he did on behalf of the Greater Bridgeport NAACP and the National Association of Black Patrolmen to increase the representation of minorities in the ranks of the fire and police forces in Bridgeport and New Haven. He noted these cases served as important legal precedents to help end municipal hiring bias elsewhere.

The second case featured a jury award of \$12.2 million to a Yale University intern who contracted HIV during her training at Yale-New Haven Hospital, claiming that as a result of the hospital’s negligence, she pricked her thumb with an infected needle while performing a procedure on a patient infected with HIV. “I am very proud of the positive effect this malpractice case had on hospitals and other health care providers and institutions in taking steps in their procedures and practices to make it safer for residents, patients, staff and for all of us,” he said.

Similarly, Koskoff said he is proud of the firm’s work in obtaining fair compensation for damages caused by negligence in the use of certain medicines. As an example, Koskoff points to a case in which a pregnant woman who was injected with a drug to induce labor experienced contractions so intense that the newborn was seriously injured. Because of that case, that particular drug can no longer be administered by injection to a mother before the birth of a baby in Connecticut.

In another case, a Connecticut hospital had been sued for not performing studies on youngsters with a propensity for strokes, one of the characteristics of sickle cell anemia. The firm donated the settlement amount to the hospital to cover the cost of the specialized medical equipment that will be used to diagnose and treat the deadly disease early.

Because of his expertise in medical legal matters, Koskoff was recently brought into the wrongful death lawsuit brought by the family of Michael Jackson. The goal was to bring out some truth about what happened to the pop performer. “Along the way, we learned that Michael was not only the most successful performer in the history of music, but the most generous performer in the history of entertainment,” he said.

In addition to numerous major medical malpractice cases, as lead counsel, Koskoff reached a \$17 million case against the state of



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Connecticut for illegal wiretapping, a victory that echoes another of his father’s memorable quotes: “If you are a lawyer, you stand between the abuse of governmental power and the individual.”

Among his numerous accolades, Koskoff holds the distinction as Connecticut’s only member in The Inner Circle of Advocates, limited to the top 100 trial lawyers in the nation.

A frequent speaker on Court TV, Koskoff also received formal training as an actor from the American Shakespeare Academy, noting that this experience has been extremely helpful in conveying complex ideas in a direct and meaningful way to juries.

His urge to reach an even larger audience may be satisfied if a screenplay with a legal plot he has written (one of his personal passions) gets the green light for the silver screen.

As to the firm’s future? Joshua Koskoff represents the third generation of Koskoffs at the bar of justice and has an impressive record as a trial lawyer, following in the tradition of his father and grandfather.