

MICHIGAN LAWYERS WEEKLY

Vol. 22, No. 1
November 19, 2007

Up and Coming Lawyers

Please join your colleagues in celebrating Michigan Lawyers Weekly's "Up & Coming Lawyers."

There are many stars among the veteran members of the Michigan legal community, but a number of attorneys fresh out of the starting blocks are beginning to make their presence known.

In this salute to the rising stars of the Michigan bar, Michigan Lawyers Weekly features profiles of members of the legal profession, nominated by their peers, who have distinguished themselves in some way.

Our readers nominated dozens of "Up & Coming Lawyers" who have already established a name for themselves early on in their careers — and who seem poised for even greater accomplishments in the future. It was a tough process to narrow down the excellent choices presented to us.

2007

Mark C. Rossman

Challenge of complex litigation plus total client dedication equals winning combination for partner of Troy firm

If the courtroom is a battlefield, Troy attorney Mark C. Rossman doesn't mind affixing his helmet, strapping on his boots and grabbing a bayonet.

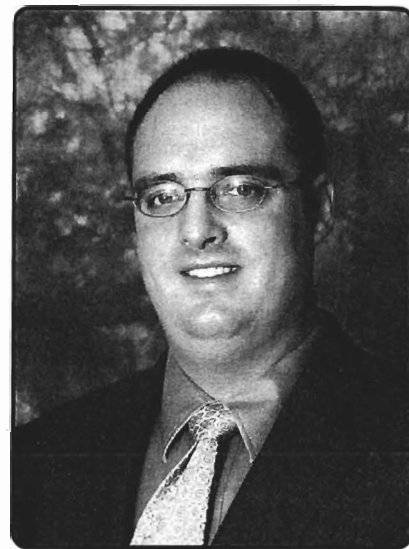
"When a case involves a lot of money, you're going to meet some resistance on the other side of the table," he explains. "We are constantly involved in litigation that's really heated and intense. They present significant challenges, which we embrace and do everything we can to overcome and attain a good result. You really have to be willing to go into the lions' den and take them on."

But for some people, there's more than just fighting the fight — there's also leading the charge, something Rossman was prepared to do when, at age 32, Gerard Mantese of Troy-based Mantese & Associates made him the firm's partner in December 2006. The firm's now called Mantese and Rossman, P.C.

"I'm the kind of person who, when I get to the point where I'm capable of something, I'm more than happy to assume the responsibility that goes along with it," Rossman said. "And I think after five years of working with Gerard, when he offered the opportunity to become his partner, I felt I was ready for it."

The Grosse Pointe native's credentials sheet certainly has proven his readiness. As lead attorney and chief negotiator, he obtained more than \$4 million in aggregate settlements over the past five years, along with \$650,000-plus in trial and arbitration verdicts as second chair counsel.

He's handled complex business and commercial litigation, shareholder disputes, class actions and high-asset divorces and custody disputes, along with litigation involving RICO,



FTDA, ERISA and the Lanham Act.

But no matter what he handles, Rossman knows the human factor always comes first.

"I find that you [always need to] listen closely to your clients and be frank with them in terms of what they should expect and how the case will likely proceed," he said. "You're honest with them all the time. You don't back down and you don't let your client get pushed around."

Q. *You have had a lot of success at a very young age. What is your secret?*

A. The secret to being successful in this profession, on a number of levels, is total dedication to your clients. Your job is to get them good results and make them feel as though their case is the most important case that you're handling, because to them, it is probably the most important thing going on in their lives, or for a company, at that particular stage in its existence.

Some of the things I always emphasize are some of the things Gerard has encouraged in my practice from day one, which are prompt[ness], returning your clients' phone calls, explaining to them what's going on in their case, giving them their pleadings that are filed in the courthouse, understanding their goals and pursu-

ing them, and mapping out a strategy on how you're going to get there.

Q. *You've handled many big cases in your career. What drew you to the complex cases?*

A. It's the intellectual stimulation that it provides, as well as the demand for all of the things I think are important in the law [field], which are thoroughness, getting to know your client, getting to know the subject matter intricately, doing your legal research, understanding the evidence and applying that evidence to the law, then presenting your case to the judge and jury. Plus the challenges that go along with that I find to be particularly fulfilling.

Q. *What do you consider to be your biggest success at Mantese and Rossman?*

A. A couple of years ago, we defended a mortgage lender in an ERISA case [*Trustees of the Carpenters' Pension Trust Fund v. AAA Mortgage Corporation*] and the case involved some extremely complex and sophisticated issues of breach of fiduciary duty. Pending in federal court for several years, it involved some intense litigation. Gerard and I were able to obtain a dismissal of that case. I think that is a good example of my firm being able to get our arms around a sophisticated type of statute, take on a formidable opponent and obtain a good result for our client.

Q. *High-asset divorces and custody disputes, an area you also handle, is a more close-to-home legal field for the general public, one where emotions are tested. How do you handle this volatile field?*

A. It's really the same formula that I apply to the other cases I handle, which also can be volatile and personal for the people involved. ... If you're patient and professional and understand what your client's needs are and what their goals are, you can resolve these cases in such a way that does the least possible harm to the family involved in the proceedings. It's never easy for the parties involved in a divorce case, and there's often times significant fallout in a lot of people's lives surrounding it. And I think as the lawyer, it's your job not to exasperate that.

Q. *What do you think about using mediation? How does it contribute to resolving disputes in general?*

A. It's a good process that needs to be considered in every case. We have a lot of good third-party mediators around the Detroit area — former judges, experienced attorneys. And sometimes it does help to bring the perspective of a third party in to attempt to procure a settlement. If a settlement that your client is interested in can be attained, I consider that a good result. On the other hand, as a litigation attorney, you have to prepare your case for trial from day one. Not only is that the only way you're ever going to get a good settlement for your client — by showing the other side that you're ready to take your case to trial and you're intent on doing so — it also enables you to achieve those settlements. Ultimately, sometimes mediation doesn't work, but it's very important to consider.

Q. *When you went to Wayne State University Law School, what drew you to participating in its student trial advocacy program?*

A. A partner and myself won the trial competition there, in my third year. And that was just a great way to get a little more comfortable than I otherwise would have been going into the courtroom after I first started practicing. You practice examining witnesses and handling what judges throw at you, introducing evidence and questioning. Those are important techniques to develop before you actually go out into practice. It's obviously no substitute for the real thing, but that was one program I found to be really, really useful.

Q. *We're in a new era where everything is done electronically, including researching the law online.*

A. It's all computer-based now. I can find anything I need through Westlaw or Lexis. It's really allowed lawyers to be extremely thorough. You can research cases around the country, courts of all levels, you can more quickly — and more accurately — check your sources. So I think it's great; it's opened up the universe of legal jurisprudence to everyone.

— BY DOUGLAS J. LEVY

Name: Mark C. Rossman

Age: 32

Graduated: Wayne State University Law School (2001); University of Michigan, B.A., English (1998)

Position: Partner, Mantese and Rossman, P.C. (2006-present); associate, Mantese and Associates (2001-06)

Professional affiliations: American Bar Association; case evaluator for Oakland County

Most valuable lesson from law school: How to prepare 100 percent for everything you need to do. In law school, you can't do well on a test unless you know the law inside and out. There's no cutting corners in law school, and likewise, there's no cutting corners when you handle a case.

On the younger generation of attorneys: What amazes me is how quickly the new attorneys start to seem young! [*laughs*] The new attorneys I see coming out of the law schools around here, they're hungry for jobs. It's a tough job market these days, and there's a lot of competition for them, and I see a lot of excellent candidates, people who look like they're eager to get involved in this type of litigation. They're raring to go.

Goal upon graduating law school: When I started law school, I knew I wanted to do litigation. I wanted to do what went along with it — depositions, trials, courtroom appearances. I met my now partner, Gerard Mantese, through an on-campus interview, and I was immediately struck with the fact that he ran a very vigorous and exciting law practice that handled the large-scale, sophisticated cases that I wanted to handle.

On pain-in-the-neck lawyers: If you feel someone is acting in a way that's inappropriate or is not being forthright with you or the judge, or is abusive, don't stoop to that level. Don't let them rile you up. You respond with the facts and the law. You can't let those people get under your skin, because if you do, they've gotten the best of you and it'll show in some adverse way.

What would you be doing if you weren't practicing law: I'd probably be in some facet of business, maybe working for one of the clients I represent. The subject matter of my work is business, and obviously it intrigues me; the kinds of disputes and issues that arise in business are what I deal with in the litigation context, so I'd imagine I'd probably be doing something along those lines.

On what kind of reputation you'd like to have in the legal community: I want to be known as someone who's dedicated to his clients, honest, fair, smart, prepared, and will vigorously litigate his cases, taking them to trial when necessary.

On how co-workers might describe you: I'd hope they'd describe me as someone who works hard, is honest, dedicated to his clients, loyal, will back [co-workers] up on things and will do everything I can to help them in their practice.

Role models: Gerard Mantese is an excellent mentor, not only for me when I was starting out, but also for the other attorneys we have working here. He's an excellent example of what one should aspire to be as a litigation attorney. And, of course, my dad, Chris Rossman, who's an attorney at Foley & Lardner, LLP and who has been a wonderful example of what it means to be an attorney.

On where you'll be in 10 years: I'll be a partner at Mantese and Rossman. From day one, I've been really happy with my job here. I've always looked forward to coming into work, which is something that's particularly special. I appreciate the security that I have here, and I only see it getting better as we continue to grow this law firm.

Advice for young lawyer wannabes: When you're in law school, students should take as much advantage of extracurricular activities and programs that there are. Law review teaches you how to write, moot court teaches appellate work, and the trial advocacy programs teach you how to try cases. You only get once chance to take part in those programs, and employers are interested in law students who do one or more of those things.