

DAILY BUSINESS REVIEW

PROFILES IN LAW

Litigator Todd Levine's Passion for Music, Art, Math and Science Helps in the Courtroom

by Lidia Dinkova

Litigator Todd Levine has all the professional background common among successful litigators: A law degree, years of experience, mentors who guided him when he embarked on his career and a dedication to the job.

But Levine has skills outside the legal field that he credits for his success as well.

Levine is an avid musician who has played guitar since he was about 10 years old, he said. He also draws, plays a bit bass guitar and some keyboards, and has a penchant for math and science.

This combination of creativity and a gift for exact sciences have allowed him a more "out-of-the-



J. ALBERT DIAZ

Litigator Todd Levine plays guitar, a bit of bass guitar and some keyboards, and also has a propensity and a gift for math and science.

TODD LEVINE

Born: North Miami, 1966

Children: Karen Levine

Spouse: Zachary and Jacob

Education: University of Florida Levin College of Law, J.D., 1991; University of Florida, B.S.B.A., 1988

Experience: Kluger, Kaplan, Silverman, Katzen & Levine, 2009-present; Kluger, Peretz, Kaplan & Berlin, 1991- 2009

box" approach to litigation, he said.

Take as an example that time he was in a mediation, and the mediator walked in holding new evidence just presented by the other side that at first appeared to hurt Levine's case.

But Levine turned things around, he said.

"I had never seen those documents before but I pulled the documents and, frankly I don't remember what I saw in them but in a matter of five minutes ... I found something in one of the documents. I was able to point to

this particular aspect of the documents, and I said, 'This is the reason I will win this case.' And the mediator's jaw dropped. He couldn't believe that I came up with such a quick response that turned the tables on the other side so quickly. It was because I was able to see something the other side did not see," Levine recalled.

Since then, Levine said, he has heard from several of his colleagues that the mediator has told the story.

"The mediator told the story time and time again about how he couldn't believe how I was able to, at the spur of the moment, take what appeared to be really harmful evidence and turn it around," Levine said.

Levine is a founding member and partner at Kluger, Kaplan, Silverman, Katzen & Levine, based in Miami. It's a litigation-only firm but also deals with family law, which includes litigation and non-litigation matters. It has a Boca Raton and a Minneapolis office.

The firm was started in 2009 by Levine and Alan Kluger, Abbey Kaplan, Steve Silverman, Bruce Katzen, Jason Marks, Michael Perse and Philippe Lieberman. All eight had worked together in the litigation department at Kluger, Peretz, Kaplan & Berlin, a different firm from Kluger Kaplan.

"It was just that the litigation department was a cohesive group in that firm (Kluger Peretz) and we worked very well together. We had a common vision and we decided that it made the most sense for us and for our careers and for our clients to move forward as a litigation

only boutique, which has grown," Levine said.

It started with 17 attorneys and now has more than 30.

But more than its size, it has grown its caliber of cases. It can boast it has worked on high-profile cases and for high-profile clients—such as retired professional baseball player Alex Rodriguez, whom the firm represented in his divorce.

For his part, Levine has represented Rodriguez in various matters, although Levine wasn't involved in the divorce proceedings.

Levine also has represented prominent commercial real estate broker Edie Laquer in several successful cases. Among them: In 2009, her brokerage, Laquer Corporate Realty Group Inc., was awarded a \$3.4 million judgment in a suit against Africa Israel Properties alleging she wasn't paid commission on a property sale agreement. In 2012, Levine again represented Laquer's brokerage in a case where developer Mark Siffin paid \$905,771 to the brokerage after it sued Siffin and affiliate Maefield Holdings over a loan it had made to the defendants.

More recently, in 2016, Levine was part of the Kluger Kaplan team that represented Sweetwater Mayor Orlando Lopez in a dispute with commissioners who had voted to approve a budget that among other things relied on \$2 million in revenue from the sale of a property that at the time hadn't been listed. The commissioners also reinstated salaries for staff

members Lopez had laid off and it excluded pay for Lopez's hires.

Miami-Dade Circuit Judge Barbara Areces ruled that balancing the budget with anticipated proceeds from the land sale violated Florida law, and she authorized Lopez to use his proposed budget.

There's a pending appeal on Areces' order.

Levine said he attributes the success of Kluger Kaplan to the close-knit group of founders and to the supportive environment.

"I think that the core of the firm, which are the founding members, work very well together. We worked together for many years. ... We have a strong culture at our firm of mentoring younger attorneys and teaching younger attorneys on how to think outside the box and to come up with novel approaches to problem solving," Levine said.

It was exactly this type of mentoring at Kluger Peretz that helped him become a complex business litigator.

"I attribute it to people who were initially my mentors ... who taught me how to take my talents and convert them into becoming an excellent lawyer," Levine said. "We have selected people to join our firm (Kluger Kaplan) and then have helped teach them and mentor them into developing their practice and their skills to enhance our reputation by way of the results that we achieve for our clients."

Lidia Dinkova covers South Florida real estate for the Daily Business Review. Contact her at LDinkova@alm.com or 305-347-6665. On Twitter @LidiaDinkova.