

ATTORNEY AT LAW

MAGAZINE

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Tom Culmo
– **Trial Attorney
of the Month**



**Yery Marrero and
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Marrero and Bozorgi
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John W. Kozyak
Attorney of the Month

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Every so often you have the opportunity to meet a person whose essence literally spans the chasm of time. This is how I felt after getting to know John Kozyak, and attending the annual mentoring picnic that John had started in the legal community of South Florida. I was amazed at the support and generosity from some of the most prestigious law firms and institutions in the area that mentor and sponsor those less fortunate students who have a strong desire to make the most out of their life by studying the practice of law. This group effort is truly heartwarming.

I hope you enjoy our feature stories; Yery Marrero and Susan Bozorgi, as well as Tom Culmo, as they grace the pages of this premier issue.

I look forward to meeting and getting to know more of you in the coming months.

A special thank you to Steve Davis and Matthew Ridgely at the Dade County Bar Association, as well as Joel Goren and Terry Biddulph at Sabadell United Bank for sponsoring our launch party.

I am truly happy to have such a warm welcome into the legal community of Miami.

I am also very proud to publish a magazine that will feature the attorneys in this great city that truly want to make a change.

Welcome to the premier issue of Attorney At Law magazine of Greater Miami!

Until next month.....

Rhene Leon

Rhene Leon
Publisher



Lawyer. Champion. Mentor. Friend.

Meet the many sides of Miami's John Kozyak By Kelly Liszt

Top bankruptcy lawyer John Kozyak has been nationally recognized many times over for his creative, effective representation in the most complex and contentious Chapter 11 cases. Mark Bloom, co-chair of Greenberg Traurig's National Business Reorganization and Bankruptcy Practice, would agree.

Mark met John some time ago on opposite sides of a case and to this day regards him to be "one of the most effective, prepared lawyers you will ever see, in our bankruptcy court or anywhere else." He adds, "John is uniformly well regarded by the bankruptcy judges, here and elsewhere where he practiced, and by the bankruptcy community generally."

And John's one of the toughest in his field. Although talented and endearing, he's also known for not suffering fools gladly.

John is equally uncompromising in championing diversity in the legal field. He's been a mentor who truly has made a difference in the lives of up-and-coming lawyers. H.T. Smith, respected Trial Lawyer, Activist, Professor of Law and Director of the Trial Advocacy Program at Florida International University, points out that "John has become the pre-eminent bridge builder among lawyers in Miami.

He has opened vaults of opportunity for Black lawyers, helped crack glass ceilings for women lawyers, and provided meaningful outreach to Muslim lawyers. John is a model of professionalism whose character is the gold standard."

The accolades from lawyers he's mentored as well as his peers are heartfelt, reflecting his commitment to bettering the legal community. For Kozyak, that commitment began with seeing injustice.

"I grew up in a totally segregated community outside of St. Louis. I graduated from high school shortly after the Civil Rights Act of 1964 was enacted, which, by the way, was not well accepted in my town. I saw much discrimination."

While growing up, his mother taught him to not try to understand segregation: "Sitting on 'the wrong side' of the counter at a drugstore in



John Kozyak with his mother.

"I found from personal experience that John is overly aggressive, demanding and uncompromising — all of which have made him the marvelously effective standard bearer for our profession."

Hank Coxe III, Past President of Florida Bar, Principal, Bedell, Dittmar, DeVault, Pillans & Coxe, P.A.

St. Louis made a lasting impression, as a kid." His mother also urged him to try to make a difference, but at the time, he felt like he couldn't do much about it. In fact, the first meaningful conversation he ever had with a black person wasn't until after he graduated from college and was in the Army.

When he moved to Miami in 1974, he was surprised to find prejudice and segregation. Few law firms had females, Black or Hispanic partners, and not many even had minority associates. Women attorneys were not even allowed to eat lunch at the same

clubs many male attorneys frequented at the time.

That summer, John clerked for Aurell & Huck, and he became their first associate after he graduated. He considers John Aurell and Paul Huck to be two of the finest lawyers and people he ever met. Huck, now Judge Paul C. Huck, a senior U.S District Court Judge for the Southern District of Florida, has this to say about his former associate: "John has done some remarkable things in his

career, but I think the most important thing he has done is to increase the awareness of and commitment to the value of diversity among lawyers in our community.”

In the late 1970s, while an associate for Mahoney Hadlow & Adams (it was then the largest law firm in Florida), John was deeply involved in recruiting, especially minority attorneys. He also refused to join or go to any club that would not permit women to even eat there (and surely discriminated against Black, Hispanic and Jewish people). He adds that in 1977 his wife, Barbara Silverman – also a lawyer – was asked when she would drop out and have a family.

John also noticed early on that one of the barriers to increasing the participation of minority lawyers in the profession was the attitude from many law firm decision-makers. They would say, “We are not prejudiced. We would hire a Black [person] if we could find a qualified one.”

“WE NEEDED TO DO SOMETHING.”

John, along with Harley Tropin and Chuck Throckmorton, opened their firm in December 1982. However they had to stop moving furniture into their new offices — a curfew was imposed after a race riot broke out in nearby Overtown. “I can still almost see and smell the smoke from the burning tires.”

That night, Harley told John that if they were to stay in Miami they needed to help make a difference. Together, John, his partners and countless attorneys, judges and peers have done just that.

Kozyak Tropin & Throckmorton has been a leader in recruiting, retaining and promoting minority attorneys, from associate to shareholder. Out of the 12 partners in the firm, they have set an example by having one Cuban-American, one African-American and four women partners. They also make sure these partners have the opportunity to hold leadership roles in firm management. As for John, he personally sees that every minority lawyer in the firm is heavily promoted and supported.

When John and Harley noticed there were very few Black commercial litigators in South Florida, so they decided to

start a scholarship fund. Kozyak Tropin & Throckmorton offers a \$10,000.00 scholarship each semester to a minority student who excels in the litigation skills program at the University of Miami.

“One of our former partners, Laurel Isicoff, was hired on a part-time basis while raising three children. She is now a U.S. bankruptcy judge.”

– John Kozyak

But it’s much more than simply handing out money. John personally meets and promotes each scholarship recipient within the legal community as firm examples of qualified minority lawyers. These students are encouraged to stay in South Florida, and John has helped many of them obtain jobs. Since the inception of the scholarship in 1993, many of the recipients have become successful commercial litigators in South Florida.

John knows diversity makes great business sense by attracting exceptional talent other firms might not be interested in: “One of our former partners, Laurel Isicoff, was hired on a part-time basis while raising three children. She is now a U.S. Bankruptcy Judge. One of our other partners, Corali (‘Cori’) Lopez-Castro was made partner while on maternity leave. Both of these women are exceptional.”

In 2001, because of his commitment to women and minority lawyers within his firm, the State of Florida Commission on the Status of Women honored Kozyak Tropin & Throckmorton as the best small business for supporting women in the workplace.

A STRONG CASE FOR MENTORING

In 1994, John began mentoring a student in the University of Miami’s mentoring program for Black law students. About 10 years ago, John discovered that the University of Miami intended to end the mentoring program. He then personally set out to revitalize the program, matching each black law student at the University of Miami with at least one lawyer or judge as a mentor. His efforts were so successful that in 2001 the law school named its mentoring program after him.

He quickly expanded the mentoring program to Black law students at St. Thomas University and then to Florida International University and Nova Southeastern. Now Black students throughout the state are involved in his

mentoring efforts. John also spearheaded a mentoring program at his alma mater, Washington University in St. Louis, Missouri.

In addition, John has worked with the Cuban-American Bar Association and the Florida Association of Women Lawyers to strengthen mentoring programs. Also, he served on the executive committee of The Florida Bar's Equal Opportunity Commission and continues to encourage mentoring to be expanded throughout the state.

To this day, John still personally matches students with mentors to assure that the students have a positive mentoring experience. Through countless e-mails and frequent phone calls, he makes sure that students and their mentors are in contact throughout the school year.

Because he feels it's important that students are exposed to the practice of law very early in their careers, he encourages them to attend bar functions and legal proceedings with their mentors. He also encourages them to meet with mentors informally.

"John did not just 'open doors' for me. Instead, he kicked them down before I even had a chance to knock."

*– Nathalie Cadet-James,
Assistant County Attorney, Miami-Dade County*

In fact, many student-mentor matches through his programs have resulted in strong, committed friendships that continue well after the students graduate from law school. One of John's mentees, Nathalie Cadet-James, is now a colleague in the legal community as well as a close family friend. She credits much of her career success to him: "There is no question that the professional achievements I have earned in large part are owed to John."

The highlight of the mentoring program is the Annual Minority Mentoring picnic. The event began more than 15 years ago as a cocktail reception for UM Black law students hosted by John and his wife, Barbara, in their home. The event grew in popularity, so they moved the reception to the UM law school and later to a restaurant, as the group of students and supporters increased. By 2003, the event

gained so much attention and interest, John, his law partner Detra Shaw-Wilder and his wife started the Minority Mentoring Picnic.



John with Detra Shaw-Wilder.

The picnic gives students an opportunity to meet, talk and connect with lawyers and judges in a relaxed environment. Throughout the entire event, John can be seen walking around and making introductions, so that by the end of the day every law student is paired with a mentor.

At the first picnic, Kozyak and his team hosted approximately 200 Black law students, lawyers, judges and guests. Then he began involving all minority law students from all Florida law schools. Last year, he estimated more than 3,000 law students, judges, lawyers and guests attended, which included Black, Hispanic, Caribbean, Asian, and Muslim people, women, gays and lesbians and people with disabilities. More than 50 law and accounting firms and 31 organizations participated as well.

Judge Paul C. Huck, said he looks forward to the picnic every year. "I wouldn't miss it," he said. "John is so dedicated to organizing the picnic and making sure that mentors connect with mentees there."

Kozyak's unmatched networking skills extend from the legal field to the non-profit sector. "He's also a connector, an introducer," said Joyce Oberdorf, president and CEO of the National Parkinson Foundation. (Both of John's parent's have Parkinson's disease, so this is a cause near and dear to him.) John sits on the foundation's board and is heavily involved in most of the major decisions the NFP makes. Oberdorf adds, "If he makes a commitment, he will use all of his power to get things done."



Judge Huck is surrounded by mentees at the Annual Minority Mentoring Picnic.

DIVERSITY'S LASTING EFFECTS

Because of his efforts and the efforts of hundreds of others in the field, John sees many more law firms, agencies and corporations are embracing diversity. He also sees a larger number of local law school students succeed in law school, with more deciding to stay in South Florida to practice. He knows they feel supported and encouraged when they learn about the mentoring program and attend the annual picnic.

Another lawyer who has known Kozyak for decades understands how much Kozyak is dedicated to mentoring. "He's a caring, kind, charitable person who does many things for the community, but his minority mentoring is the most important," said Bob Josefsberg of the law firm Podhurst Orseck.

"He is the Johnny Appleseed of helping minorities. He has made sure that many of them have a mentor who gives them confidence and someone to talk to and bounce ideas off of.

This increases the quality of their lives. John makes sure they get good jobs and succeed."

Ever quick to deflect the spotlight, John credits the hundreds, if not thousands, of individuals who work together to make sure the legal profession is inclusive to all. Judge Huck agrees that he "doesn't like to take credit himself for getting something done. He always wants to give others the credit."

"He has a mixture of talent and humility, something you seldom see," said Greenberg Traurig's Mark Bloom. "His humility really is genuine, and it comes through in both a personal and a professional setting. That, frankly, is one of the most endearing things about him."

Kozyak believes he is the one who has benefited the most from mentoring. "Many of my mentees have become part of my family life, and they know I love them." He adds, "Diversity has enriched me, both personally and in business, in so many ways. I have made up — big time — for not talking with a black person the first 20 years of my life."

"His humility really is genuine, and it comes through in both a personal and a professional setting. That, frankly, is one of the most endearing things about him."

— Mark Bloom,
Co-Chair, National Business Reorganization and
Bankruptcy Practice, Greenberg Traurig, LLP

The power of one.

JOHN KOZYAK AMAZES AND INSPIRES ABA PRESIDENT STEVE ZACK.

"Many talk and meet about increasing diversity in our profession (and our communities), but John daily shows us that each of us can make a positive difference if we will but take action by reaching out and including others different than ourselves in our lives. (And it also enriches our lives)."

"John's unfailing commitment and passion, plus his remarkable leadership skills, have inspired so many others to become involved to achieve even greater participation in the minority picnic each year, which has created a wonderful sense of bonded community."

"To me, the privilege of being a lawyer brings with it the responsibility to be a leader in the community in which one lives and practices to promote the common good. John is that type of leader, and I am very blessed to know him, to have had the opportunity to work with him and to be inspired by him."



John Kozyak pictured with ABA President Steve Zack.