

Baltimore

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LEGAL EAGLES

Our 30 Best Lawyers

When all else fails, here are 30 top-flight lawyers who will kick butt and take names.

The hee-haw next door just opened a Harley repair business in your residentially zoned neighborhood; your spouse left last night with the kids, the furniture, and the furniture salesperson; your boss just fired you for wearing a turban at staff meetings; and your stockbroker neglected to utter the words "ridiculously high risk" when he put your life savings in Ukrainian potato futures.

You've been wronged, tortured, bilked, and bamboozled, and you need a lawyer now.

The good news is Baltimore has a lot of *really good* lawyers, including more than a few who are nationally recognized in their fields. Our mission every couple of years: Find them.

Stephen L. Snyder,
Malpractice Lawyer

A black and white portrait of Stephen L. Snyder, a middle-aged man with a receding hairline, smiling broadly. He is wearing a dark suit jacket, a white dress shirt, and a red tie. A pocket square is visible in his jacket. The background is dark and out of focus.

STEPHEN L. SNYDER

MASTER OF THE MALPRACTICE UNIVERSE

Nine years ago, Steve Snyder was on the cover of a magazine—*The Sun's* late Sunday magazine, to be specific—but he didn't much like what he read inside.

What a difference nine years makes—especially for a trial lawyer who claims to have racked up \$150 million in settlements and verdicts in just the past five years. Now he's an inside player, one of 30 winners of this year's "Top Lawyers" moniker, and is now teamed up with one of Baltimore's longest-standing power players, Arnold Weiner, who joined Snyder's 10-lawyer Pikesville firm last year.

"My adversaries see me as a winner. That's very important to me," says Snyder. "I was considered a people's lawyer rather than a lawyer's lawyer. But over the last 10 years, I think I've earned the respect of my toughest critics, my professional peers."

The 50-year-old University of Baltimore law grad was portrayed as a showman (albeit one who got big results) who was not above crying before juries to win their sympathy. But as Snyder's practice has kept growing, he's moved as far up the intellectual food chain as the financial one.

Building from his base as a malpractice

and business lawyer, he is increasingly turning up in complex commercial litigation as well, notably the fight to stick the national accounting firm of Ernst & Young with a big chunk of the bill for the demise of Merry-Go-Round Enterprises. At issue: Did Merry-Go-Round fail because of negligence and conflicts of interest by Ernst & Young, which was retained by MGR to help map a turn-around strategy? Or did it fail simply because Boogie Weinglass and the corporate handlers sent in by creditors couldn't keep up with the tastes of young people?

"I like taking on high-risk, large-scale business torts," says Snyder. And years of contingency fees on \$150 million in awards gives him staying power in cases that other lawyers might settle so they can get paid. "I like to take a good case and make it into a great case. [Merry Go Round] is a good case. When the bell rings [for a trial next April] it will be a great case."

If he's right—he casually tosses out \$1 billion as a starting point for a compensation claim—the case will be in good company. Notched on Snyder's holster are big wins over New Jersey cable giant T.C.I. (\$100 million), Bell Atlantic (two judgments totalling \$36 mil-

lion), and Maryland's largest legal-malpractice verdict. He's taken depositions from the chairmen of Bell Atlantic, T.C.I., and now Ernst & Young. Predicts Snyder, "I don't think I'll ever be on those three boards."

It's not like he cares. There's something irreducible about good plaintiff's lawyers, something rebellious that makes them bad golf partners for CEOs in general. Remember, Snyder is still a man who can point with some glee to the story on his conference room wall about winning a \$10-million case against Blue Cross Blue Shield of Maryland, and then he can cackle that he lives next door to Bill Jews.

But Snyder does have at least some conventional cares. He's already got a theme picked out for the next article, nine years from now. By then, he hopes his three older sons will all be in his firm (one's there, one's in law school, and one's in pre-law). "I'm extremely excited about getting up in a courtroom and introducing my son or sons as part of the team," Snyder says. But even his proud-papa reverie has an edge of a trial lawyer's calculation. "I think juries will identify with that."

• TIM MULLANEY