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MAGAZINE®

ROBERT R. FUGGI, JR.
Attorney of the Month

FRANK PINA OF THE MERCADIEN GROUP
Professional Profile



ATTORNEY OF THE MONTH

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ROBERT R. FUGGI, JR.

..... *a* VOICE *for* *the* OPPRESSED

By Lynette Carrington

New Jersey residents will be hard pressed to find more qualified attorneys than those at the Fuggi Law Firm in Toms River. “To be a successful trial lawyer, you have to care about your clients and you have to believe in them,” said Robert R. Fuggi, Jr., a tenet he believes wholeheartedly.

He has been selected as one of the National Trial Lawyers Top 100 Trial Lawyers. The National Trial Lawyers is a national organization composed of The Top 100 Trial Lawyers from each state. Membership is obtained through special invitation and is extended only to those attorneys who exemplify superior qualifications of leadership, reputation, influence, stature and profile as civil plaintiff or criminal defense lawyers.

Robert R. Fuggi, Jr. and the Fuggi Law Firm have been involved in numerous high-profile cases that have received national attention. He, along with his litigation staff of attorneys and paralegals, has built one of the most successful law firms in Ocean County and throughout the state of New Jersey.

“We represent those that need a voice,” he said. He attempts

to handle cases that other firms aren’t interested in or may be too complex. The firm, which was formed as a workers’ compensation litigation practice, has morphed over the years into handling complex and difficult litigation and high-profile cases.

INFLUENCES

“In law school, I took a class called Trial Advocacy taught by professor Stanford,” Fuggi explained. “He had been the dean of Baylor Law School and the head trial practice teacher. He took a real interest in me and tried to teach me the finer points of being a trial lawyer. I had wanted to be a trial lawyer because those were the people in the courtroom. They were the people who were well spoken and represented the people. That really appealed to me more than just sitting in an office.”

IN THE TRENCHES

Fuggi Law Firm specializes in personal injury and wrongful death claims, sexual assault and sexual abuse cases, workers’ compensation, family law and criminal defense. “We’re a



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Top Row: Amy O'Shea, Cathy Kozlej, Ronald A. Rosa, Esq., Theresa Lucas, Darlene Cummings & Valerie Callan-Schmidt
Seated: Sandra M. Guage, Esq., Robert R. Fuggi, Jr., Esq. & James M. McKenna, Esq.

litigation law firm, so all the areas of law are related to litigation,” noted Fuggi. “I oversee the cases, the cases going to trial or the cases getting more publicity.”

“We’ve probably had several really high-profile statewide and nationwide cases that have received a lot of recognition,” Fuggi said. “We exposed institutional abuse extending back decades at a fairly good-sized church in New Jersey. The pastor, who has since died, had sexually abused children in the area, children attending the affiliated school and altar boys.”

Since Fuggi attended theological seminary and now is finishing up his graduate degree at Princeton, he is often approached to handle sexual abuse cases against religious organizations and other institutions.

“Since I had significant trial experience

compiled with a strong theological background, we began to represent victims of institutional and sexual abuse,” he said. “Many firms wouldn’t take on these types of cases because of the complexities of the statute of limitations. We believed the victims needed a voice and legal representation, so we began to litigate these cases. The results were surprising; we were able to successfully navigate the legal thresholds and obtain favorable resolutions on a large scale.”

Fuggi continues with that representation, setting the legal standard in sex abuse cases and trials statewide against many organizations. “A monsignor on the opposing side of one of these cases told me in the throngs of litigation that ‘We are doing God’s work,’” Fuggi said.

By excellence and professionalism, they continue to represent clients aggressively.

He acknowledges that these cases are very difficult. “There were well over 20 plaintiffs in the case as well as witnesses,” Fuggi said. “I was dealing with a lot of people. It was a tremendous amount of work and took almost five years to bring to a resolution.”

LEAGUE OF THEIR OWN

When Robert Fuggi and his team set out on this lawsuit, they were operating under difficult circumstances. “The main issue with a lot of these cases is that many times the lawsuit is filed 20, 30 or even 40 years after the incidents happened,” Fuggi explained. “In New Jersey, there’s a two-year statute of limitations for personal

injury cases.” At the time, the statute of limitations was harsh, making recovery a herculean task.

“We took the cases anyway,” Fuggi said. “We advocated for these victims’ rights. It was the socially responsible thing to do. Sometimes when you’re not able to obtain the relief you deserve, you need to go to trial.”

The statute of limitations for childhood sexual abuse cases is very different from the regular two-year statute of limitations for other personal injury lawsuits. Many people who were abused as children don’t acknowledge the abuse and don’t understand the long-term effects it has had on them.

It may be years later, when they enter therapy or treatment for a mental health problem, alcoholism or drug addiction, that they finally face the abuse issues. For sexual abuse cases, the statute of limitations clock begins the moment the person realizes he or she was a victim. Evidence will still need to be gathered and a strong case made to support the claim — this is Fuggi’s area of strength.

POLITICAL CORRUPTION 101

Operation Bid Rig was one of the largest political corruption cases in the United States. “Solomon Dwek, a confidential informant, had been doing illegal things with investments and money to the tune of about \$700 million,” Fuggi explained. “It was essentially a Ponzi scheme in New Jersey with a lot of the local community, Jewish synagogues, banks and regular people who lost their money. He was arrested for bank fraud and then became an informant for the government authorities.”

Dwek tried to bribe and involve various New Jersey politicians in illegal operations. “I represented one of the arrested politicians, an assemblyman and rising star in the

Republican Party,” Fuggi said. “He was a bright young man and had all the potential in the world. Unfortunately, he made some bad decisions and was caught in this trap. I represented him through the entire case, which lasted over a year. The jury returned a verdict of guilty after three days of difficult deliberation. He was convicted. There was video of him assumedly taking the bribe in a white envelope. We took the position that he was doing legal consulting work.”

The case took on national media attention and the trial was followed day-by-day.



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“We try to take more socially and morally significant cases,” Fuggi said. “I’m taking a case right now where inmates at a Burlington County Jail in New Jersey are suffering institutional abuse, culminating, in certain circumstances, in death. Many are in need of medical care and they don’t get it because their voices aren’t heard. They strapped one inmate up for 10 days in a straitjacket because he didn’t take a shower and smelled. They left him in a cell, in agony and pain, forced to defecate on himself. The inmate finally died. Another inmate wasn’t given antibiotics for an infection and later died. This should not happen in America. We’re filing a suit in Federal District court in New Jersey for those claims, nobody deserves treatment like that.”

“We didn’t take any of these cases for publicity,” Fuggi said. “We took them because it was the morally responsible thing to do. As lawyers, we’re well-educated, we have the wherewithal and I think we have an obligation to help out those who are voiceless. Thankfully, we’ve done very well doing that.”



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AT A GLANCE

THE FUGGI LAW FIRM

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EDUCATION

- Saint Joseph’s University, Politics, 1984-1988
- Regent University School of Law, Juris Doctor, 1992
- New Brunswick Theological Seminary, 2005-2012
- Princeton Theological Seminary, Candidate: Masters of Divinity, 2015

PROFESSIONAL MEMBERSHIPS

American Trial Lawyers Association, 1994 – 2002

PROFESSIONAL CERTIFICATIONS

Certified Trial Attorney, Supreme Court of New Jersey, 2007-2014

AWARDS & HONORS

National Trial Lawyers Top 100 Trial Lawyers, 2012, 2013, 2014

PHILANTHROPY & OUTREACH

Pastor, Evangelist and Theologian
Founding Pastor of Toms River Community Church, Ordained Minister, 2005
Established Community Homeless Outreach in Ocean County
Preached over 500 sermons

FAMILY

Wife, Lana Fuggi
Children: Robby, Daniel & Christian