

# MICHIGAN LAWYERS WEEKLY

December 8, 2008

Section B

## UP & COMING LAWYERS



Marla Schwaller Carew

### A salute to the rising stars of the Michigan Bar

**T**his special edition celebrates *Michigan Lawyers Weekly's* "Up & Coming Lawyers."

There are many distinguished achievers among the veteran members of the Michigan legal community, but a number of less-seasoned attorneys also are making their marks.

In this edition, *Michigan Lawyers Weekly* profiles 10 rising stars of the Michigan bar.

*Michigan Lawyers Weekly* invited its readers to nominate lawyers who, early in their careers, are establishing enviable records. Dozens of nominations arrived, and choosing just 10 was difficult.

The lawyers featured here

stood out not only for their past accomplishments, but also for their promise of future achievements.

Congratulations to all the nominees, and especially to the 10 who are *Michigan Lawyers Weekly's* "Up & Coming Lawyers" for 2008.



Damali A. Sahu



Juliana B. Sabatini



Jaimie M. Powell



Keri Lynn Middleditch



Derek D. McLeod



## Armed with the principles practiced by her family, this birth-trauma specialist refuses to back down or slow down

"There are people," Juliana Sabatini said, "who don't want to play Monopoly with me anymore."

That's because inside Sabatini, associate at Gregory & Reiter, P.C., of Bloomfield Hills, burns the competitive fire of a Michael Phelps.

"I have to keep going and never stop until I get the outcome I want," she said.

Sabatini and the other two members of the firm — Russell Gregory and Jesse M. Reiter — handle only cases of injuries in pregnancies and births.

True to her competitive spirit, Sabatini brags a little: "As far as I know, we're the only firm in the country doing this exclusively. We enjoy it, we love doing it."

The path Sabatini took to that specialty is as uncommon as the specialty itself. After earning an accounting degree from Oakland University, she studied at the Thomas M. Cooley Law School and vaguely assumed she would end up practicing some type of financial law, something to do with taxes or accounting or real estate.

Instead, staggering under the weight of student loans, she took a job with a firm representing medical-malpractice plaintiffs.

"I didn't think I was all that into it," she said, "but I enjoyed it."

Then she accepted what she calls an "amazing offer" from a firm defending against birth-injury claims.

"It was exactly the opposite of what I'm doing now," she said.

The issues are the same, Sabatini said, as is the knowledge she needs. The difference, she has found, is that she thoroughly enjoys working with the injured children and their families.

"I definitely think of myself as the good guy" in the litigation, she said.

She doesn't regret her time in defense, however.

Because of her experience, "I realize what's going to come at me from the defense," Sabatini said.

And while she was on the defense side, she had what she called a turning point.

In a deposition, she was the younger attorney up against a savvy, experienced foe. She called him "an excellent attorney."

But, "He attempted a line of questioning that was completely not allowed," Sabatini said. "I asked him to cease. He did not."

She assumed he was testing her. It was a Monopoly moment.

"I stood up and wouldn't allow it to continue," she said. "I said, 'Enough's enough.'"

She and her client left. "From that point, really," she said, "I was ready to make my mark. You never back down. You don't give up what you know is right."

The motivation to push forward comes from her family. All four of her grandparents moved to the United States from Italy. "They came here with nothing," Sabatini said, "and they never stopped working. That's where we get our hardworking mentality."

Her mom and dad were born in Italy.

"My mom is very goal-oriented, like me," Sabatini said. "She gets 100 percent into whatever she is doing."

And her dad provided the slogan: "We're always right, even when we're wrong."

"I like litigation," Sabatini said. "I like sitting in court."

The pressure is enormous.

"People are putting their lives into your hands, and they want to see positive results," she said. "Sometimes they see it, sometimes they don't."

"The nature of their cases is that these are injuries that will impact them for their entire lives. The injury never goes away. The thing to be happy about is that you have helped them. You just hope they are taken care of."

In one case, a mother got two different due dates from different doctors, Sabatini said, and as a result, the baby "should have been delivered weeks earlier." The boy has cerebral palsy, she said. "He doesn't talk, and probably never will. He needs round-the-clock care."

The settlement was for \$1.55 million.

In another case, a child born prematurely had respiratory problems and was placed on a ventilator. But, Sabatini said, the child was over-ventilated and suffered permanent brain damage.

He walks with a walker, and although he talks, his brain injuries leave him well behind the other pupils in school, she said. The family settled for \$975,000.

Even with the money, however, the family will struggle. "How it impacts them in the future," Sabatini said, "you just don't know."

Because Sabatini gets so involved in her cases, she has become an ardent believer in the value of focus groups.

"Sometimes," she said, "you have to take a step back and analyze what the general population has to say."

Her challenge is not just the practice of law. She said she has to be "a part-time doctor, too," and she loves reading medical literature to keep up with the latest information.

But she has no desire to give up the law for medicine.

"I couldn't be a doctor," she said. "I'm afraid of blood."

Except when she's playing Monopoly.

— JIM STASIOWSKI

### THE PRACTICE

**Are you thinking about your job when you go to bed at night?**

Usually. Probably the reason why I can't fall asleep.

**What one judicial ruling in U.S. or Michigan history has had the biggest effect on your practice?**

Recently, the *Boodt* case dealing with Notice of Intent requirements.

**What is the biggest myth about your profession?**

I once heard a person refer to lawyers as heartless. I am happy to say that I haven't encountered that heartless lawyer yet.

**What was the worst TV show about lawyers or the worst movie about lawyers?**

I don't really watch TV shows about lawyers, so I can't pick a worst; I'm a big fan of the show "Without a Trace," which is more of an FBI show.

**How do you deal with pain-in-the-neck lawyers?**

Kill them with kindness.

**In general, do you think judges' opinions are written clearly?**

Rarely.

**Do you want to be a judge?**

I never ruled out the possibility.

**Finish this sentence: "By the time I retire, I hope I have ..."**

Successfully represented my clients and gained the respect of my colleagues and opponents.

### WHO YOU ARE

**Name a trait you inherited from one of your parents. From mom or dad?**

My father: We're always right, even when we're wrong.

**Name a U.S. president you admire, and identify what one specific trait made him admirable:**

Most recently, Barack Obama, who inspired the nation with one word: "Change."

**Name three Web sites you have bookmarked on your computer:**

yahoo.com; google.com; wxyz.com.

**The one thing I have to do, but hate doing, is:**

Exercise.

**Worst job you ever had:**

I enjoy working and there isn't one job that I ever disliked.

**What word or phrase do you use too much?**

I'm stuck in traffic.

**Your mantra, slogan, or words to live by:**

The glass is always half-full.

**For high school and college English courses, you had to read novels. What was the worst one?**

If I had to choose one it would be "Romeo & Juliet," only for the reason that the style of writing is difficult to understand.

**What is your greatest strength?**

Organization. I never go a day without a things-to-do list.

**What tangible possession do you most prize?**

Engagement ring.

### CHOICES

**Dog or cat?**

If I had to choose, probably dog.

**Golf, tennis or bowling?**

I would have to say tennis. There is a famous tennis player with the last name Sabatini, so maybe I have acquired some skill by association?

**Beer or wine?**

Definitely wine.

**Morning person or night owl?**

Morning person.

**CNN, MSNBC or Fox News?**

CNN.

**"The Sopranos" or "Mad Men"?**

"The Sopranos." What can I say, I'm Italian.

### OPINIONS

**Global warming: dangerous or overblown?**

Dangerous.

**Who is the world's most talented performer?**

Andrea Bocelli.

**Since 1980, which one losing U.S. presidential candidate should have won?**

Al Gore.

**Who is the wisest person you know?**

My mom. She always ends up being right.

**You are in charge: Repeal one law:**

Caps on damages.



**Age:** 30

**Undergraduate:** BS, accounting, Oakland University, 2001

**Law school:** Thomas M. Cooley Law School, J.D., cum laude, 2003 (finished law school in accelerated 2 year program)

**Employment:** Attorney, Gregory & Reiter, P.C.

**Practice specialty:** Birth-trauma litigation

**Work experience:** The Thurswell Law Firm, medical malpractice; Kitch Law Firm, birth trauma defense

**Professional affiliations:** Member of Michigan Association for Justice (MAJ); executive board member of MAJ; Birth Trauma Litigation Group; member of American Association for Justice; AAJ National College of Trial Advocacy; Italian American Bar Association

**Other activities (professional):** Conduct numerous focus groups and mock trials on each of our cases locally (InFocus Research Group) for case and trial preparation; participating in national case workshops (mock trials for case analysis and trial preparation); continuing legal education workshops; educational seminars on a variety of topics affecting medical malpractice litigation

**Other activities (leisure):** Spend time with my two nephews and goddaughter; attend sporting events with my fiancé; exercise

**Family:** I'm a first-generation American citizen, as both my father and mother were born in Italy. I have one brother and one sister, so I get the best of both worlds. Since I'm the only lawyer in my family, you can imagine how many legal questions are discussed at holiday dinners, and when the disputes arise, I end up being Judge Judy.

My family is extremely important to me and we are a close group. I pride myself on being a part of a family of hardworking people. My grandparents, like my parents, were Italian immigrants. My grandparents originally came to America (without being able to speak the language) for work, and to work hard. It was difficult for them because of the language barrier, but they never gave up.

I am extremely grateful to my family because I truly believe that they embedded the following into me: be goal-oriented, and always work hard until you achieve each and every goal.