

# Patent, IP attorney helps guide Michigan insurance defense firm



By Brian Cox

When Jason Newman joined the defense firm of Cardelli Lanfear Law in 2011 as a young associate, he couldn't imagine that in a dozen or so years he would find himself as co-managing partner responsible for forging the firm's future.

"It feels like I've experienced almost the full life cycle of an attorney here," says Newman, who with fellow managing partner Mike Smith is looking forward to growing the 11-lawyer firm based in Troy, Mich.

Newman hopes to build on the firm's reputation as a leader in civil litigation. In addition to the insurance companies with which the firm has long-standing relationships, Newman sees opportunities to bring in more corporate clients looking for an alternative to Big Law.



**Attorney Jason Newman and his wife, Stacy, met as undergrads at Michigan State University where he earned a degree in chemical engineering and later his law degree.**

"We have the ability to do that," he says. "I know we can attract the talent to grow the firm."

Newman and Smith plan to broaden the firm's client base and expand its marketing reach, and Newman sees Primerus as a valuable resource in that effort. The firm has been a Primerus member since 2004 and has benefited from several referrals that turned into long-term relationships.

"Primerus has been really good for us," says Newman. "You get a chance to make personal relationships with other attorneys who you feel comfortable referring your clients to. It's not just somebody I've Googled, or I have their business card. I can tell clients that 'I've met this person. They seem like a decent human being.' Our goal is to make other Primerus attorneys feel the same about us. If they have close clients that they don't want to let down, they can feel comfortable giving that referral to our firm."

Newman's practice focuses primarily on civil defense, intellectual property, and environmental law. As a registered patent attorney, Newman also has experience in patent, trademark, and copyright litigation.

Born and raised in the Detroit suburb of Lincoln Park, Newman grew up near an open field where he remembers playing baseball and football with neighborhood kids. His mother was an X-ray technician and his father, like so many in the Detroit area, worked for General Motors.

In school, Newman proved to be good at math and physics and so it seemed a career in some field of engineering was likely. Many of his friends talked about becoming mechanical or electrical engineers with the idea of working for one of the automotive companies, but Newman was drawn to chemical engineering as something different.

It wasn't until he was a chemical engineering student at Michigan State University that Newman discovered he had broader interests outside of engineering, and he was discouraged to learn that most of the chemical engineering job opportunities would likely mean moving far from home.

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**Jason and Stacy and their two sons, Camden and Bexley, attend a charity walk at the Detroit Zoo. The two boys are named after London boroughs, inspired by Stacy's love for English history.**

After graduation, he worked for about six months in a steel-coating plant and got a taste of life in a factory. His father, who had worked for decades in an auto plant, had more than once suggested that if Newman could find work outside of a factory, he should consider it. Newman's experience at the steel-coating plant persuaded him to follow his father's advice.

"It was a lot of working midnights in the lab," recalls Newman. "It wasn't necessarily the glamorous occupation that I envisioned."

As he considered a change in career path, Newman remembered a class he took his junior year that explored different careers available to people with chemical engineering degrees. He specifically remembered a Detroit attorney with an engineering background who came to the class and talked about his work as an intellectual property lawyer.

That was Newman's initial introduction to the idea of getting a law degree, and as he gave it more thought, the more decided he became. Two years after graduating from Michigan State, he returned to his alma mater for law school.

Newman quickly realized that studying law was very different from his education in engineering where answers to problems could be defined by a mathematical equation. He remembers not understanding at first that a court ruling could have a majority opinion and a dissenting opinion.

"The first day of law school, I had read all the material and had no idea what it was talking about," he says with a laugh.

Newman's initial plan was to go into an intellectual property field of some sort. That much seemed obvious. With his undergraduate degree in chemical engineering, he qualified to sit and take the Patents Bar Exam, which he did and passed. The path ahead seemed clear and well defined.

What he couldn't have anticipated, however, was the state of the U.S. economy when he finished law school in 2008, "right in the teeth" of the Great Recession. With opportunities in IP scarce, Newman accepted a position as a judicial clerk with the Missouri Court of Appeals, Southern District, which required him to move to Springfield, Mo.

The job was challenging and fulfilling and exposed Newman to the inner workings of the court system.

"I got to work for several different judges and see how each operated compared to the others," he says. "I learned their different approaches to issues."

One of the first cases he was assigned to write a draft opinion on involved a Terry stop, which allowed police to briefly stop and search a person based on reasonable suspicion. Concluding that the man was wrongly detained and searched, Newman recommended that the lower court's opinion be reversed.

"I remember thinking how presumptuous it was of me," says Newman. "But applying the law, that's what I thought was the right outcome and so I typed it up and handed it to the judge."



**Attorney Jason Newman occasionally has a little helper when his son, Camden, visits the law offices of Cardelli Lanfear Law in Troy, Mich.**

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To his relief, the judge agreed with Newman's argument, as did the other two judges on the panel.

"It was very nerve-wracking," says Newman, "but once I got over that one, I thought, 'I guess I do know what I'm doing.'"

After two years with the appeals court, Newman gave serious thought to taking the Missouri bar exam and joining a local law firm, but though he had enjoyed the work and had made friends with other judicial clerks, Springfield didn't feel like home.

"It didn't feel like the place I wanted to be long-term," says Newman. "I felt that if I was going to try to build a legal career, I wanted it to be in Michigan."

Newman returned to Detroit and started doing document review on two large antitrust cases while he searched for a position with an intellectual property firm. Although it was a different type of firm, Cardelli Lanfear Law happened to be looking for an associate with a background in research and writing, which Newman had gained plenty of as a judicial clerk.

He joined the firm in December 2011 and was quickly presented with opportunities he might not otherwise have had at a larger firm. Within the year, he was arguing motions in court and taking depositions of expert witnesses. He often learned out of necessity.

Shortly before joining the firm, Newman had gotten married. He and his wife, Stacy, met as undergrads at Michigan State. She later earned a master's degree in history from Eastern Michigan University. The couple now have two sons, Camden, 9, and Bexley, 5.

In addition to spending time with his family, Newman enjoys working on restoring a 1969 Chevrolet Camaro and running. He has completed five marathons, including running the Detroit Free Press Marathon twice.

In 2017, Newman was named a partner at Cardelli Lanfear Law, and now as co-managing partner with Mike Smith, he is excited by the challenge of leading the firm into the future.

"Mike and I complement each other well," says Newman. "We see things from a slightly different perspective and so when we come to the same conclusion, we feel pretty confident that we've got the right answer."

For the chemical engineer in Newman, it's an approach to managing the firm that is a formula for success.



Jason's son, Bexley, sports a dragon wing headband on a visit to Great Wolf Lodge waterpark.