

Exuding confidence

Kevorkian attorney often called arrogant

By Ralph R. Echtenaw
staff writer

Like radio talk show host Rush Limbaugh, West Bloomfield attorney Geoffrey Fieger, noted for his defense of Dr. Jack Kevorkian, has been accused of especial arrogance but prefers to call it confidence.

Although Fieger doesn't claim to be the most dangerous man in America, or the epitome of morality and virtue, or walk around with half his brain tied behind his back as Limbaugh does, his confidence in his ability is monumental.

"I was meant to do what I do," he said. "And I'm as good at it as they come. I have a natural talent for this. I believe if you hire me, you've got the best there ever was and ever will be."

"SOME PEOPLE DON'T like me. Some people find me very arrogant. (But) I have self-confidence. They find that to be arrogant. I think that I'm kind. I like animals. I like cats a lot. I'm very approachable. I like to talk to people. I find people interesting," Fieger said.

But like former baseball player

Pete Rose, who was often charged with having what one might call excessive pride, Fieger can convincingly back up his claim.

At 40 he has practiced law for just 12 years and already collected 10.1 million-plus verdicts, mostly in medical malpractice cases. In addition, Fieger said he's accumulated 25-30 settlements of more than \$1 million. Earlier this year he won \$12.6 million for a client in a medical malpractice lawsuit.

Fieger attributes his success to a coincidental collision of ability and the profession in which it could be most effectively employed. In short, he says he's been lucky.

"Everything in my personality happens to mesh well with the things I do," he said. "The best thing that can ever happen to anybody is to have a job that doesn't seem like work. You have to be awfully lucky to be in a situation that you can do what you want."

Fieger also finds that the means of his success consist, in part, of acting training he got at the University of Michigan. "It allows me to think on my feet," he said. "You have to have a sense of theatrics to maintain in-

terest. (But) the idea that I could deceive (a jury) is just not true. Anybody who thinks it works like that knows nothing about the law."

While love of money motivates many people to become attorneys, Fieger says that, ironically, his success (and therefore his wealth) was made because he didn't seek financial largess in law.

"I really don't think about the money," he said. "I never really cared about money. (The job) is all-consuming to me. It was never important that I made money at it."

PERHAPS FIEGER CAN find the roots of his ability in the family tree. Growing up in Oak Park, he was exposed to law through his father Bernard, an attorney who had an office in Southfield that Fieger joined in 1979.

Surprisingly, or maybe to be expected, Fieger's siblings have also found prominence in life. Brother Doug is lead singer of The Knack, a rock 'n' roll band famous for the song "My Sharona," circa 1980. Sister Beth writes television scripts in Hollywood.

But Fieger's desire for passive en-

tertainment is necessarily limited by his vocation/avocation. Although he admits to a predilection for football and boxing, "kicking my opponents in the ass is my hobby."

Speaking of football, Fieger's new-found celebrity, thanks to Kevorkian, has derailed his ability to have a meal in peace. Sunday he was at the Sage Deli with Kevorkian, watching the Detroit Lions game when "two news media saw (us) and started harassing us and we had to go. It's gotten to that point where almost I can't go out. It can't go on. It's getting a little crazy."

However, Fieger will accept the notoriety as the price of success. As one of Michigan's premier medical malpractice attorneys, custodian of a landmark case where Kevorkian is concerned, the owner of six lake-front houses in Oakland County and two Caribbean homes, the case Fieger makes for his competence is compelling.

"I'm not a risk-taker. I don't gamble. I never bought a lottery ticket in my life. I don't bet on the horse races. The only thing I bet on in my entire life is my own talent."

Conflitti found guilty in poisoning case

By Wayne Peal
and Susan DeMaggio
staff writers

Emotional — but dry-eyed — Linda Conflitti listened Tuesday as the jury delivered its verdict.

After two trials, and more than 10 months, her fate had come down to one word.

"Guilty," said jury foreman Andrew Tracey of Farmington Hills. Conflitti, 18, could face up to five years in prison after jurors found her guilty of dropping an LSD tablet into the coffee of English teacher Robert Heffernan. Sentencing is Friday, Dec. 6 before Oakland County Circuit Judge Deborah Tyner. Tyner raised bond to \$50,000 cash.

Assistant prosecutor J. Randall Secontine said he would seek the maximum sentence.

"I THINK a message has been sent to all students," said Secontine, who handled both trials. Conflitti's first trial, in May, ended in a hung jury.

Conflitti, her father Jerry and her attorney avoided reporters after the verdict was read.

"Would you be available if it was guilty for your daughter?" Jerry Conflitti had said earlier to a reporter.

Heffernan, who has been on disability from Troy Schools since the December 1990 spiking incident, was

not present Tuesday when the jury came back after deliberating five hours.

He was present, however, for Monday's closing arguments.

There, defense attorney Schroeder reminded the jury of six men and six women, that "No one saw that pill drop." Schroeder outlined six reasons why he believed Conflitti was innocent.

He questioned the integrity of the witnesses. He called the teacher an

actor who had performed in front of large audiences. He suggested that Heffernan was not drugged. Or, he theorized, someone else drugged the coffee.

He told the jury that it was the most important day in Linda's life and her case was in their hands. He insisted that the prosecution had not proven beyond reasonable doubt that Linda did it.

In his closing arguments prosecutor Secontine called the defense

"garbage."

He said the technique used to defend Conflitti was "to throw a bunch of stuff against the wall and hope something sticks."


"She is a liar," Secontine said of Conflitti. "She manipulates words."

"I ask you to apply the law equally, objectively without sympathy," he demanded of the jury. "And apply your common sense. If you do, in this case, justice and a conviction for poisoning is one and the same."

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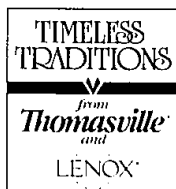


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