

# Chicago

MARCH 2002

SPRING FASHION:  
SIMPLY IRRESISTIBLE



You want them  
*for you, not*  
against you

# 30

# TOUGH LAWYERS



PLUS  
**GENIUS**  
THE U. OF C.'S NEW STAR


**OBSESSION**  
A DOCTOR'S DEADLY VOYAGE

**CLOUT**  
FAMILY TIES ON THE BALLOT

Divorce,  
Criminal Defense,  
Personal Injury,  
Civil Litigation,  
more





A woman with dark hair, wearing a dark green blazer over a light green top and a pearl necklace, is sitting at a desk. She is looking directly at the camera with a slight smile. A laptop is open in front of her. The background is a blurred office setting with shelves.

“When you’ve got a good case,  
I don’t care if you’re \$10,000 apart;  
you stick to your guns.”

-VICKI ABRAHAMSON



**PHILIP S. BECK, 50**  
**Bartlit Beck Herman**  
**Palenchar & Scott**  
 Civil litigation

IN NOVEMBER 2000, PHIL BECK WAS HAVING Thanksgiving dinner at his sister's home when the call came from his law partner Fred H. Bartlit, summoning him to Florida to handle George W. Bush's side of the vote recount case. Beck left the next day, and "eight days later we went to trial," he says.

For all that was at stake, Beck and his opponent, David Boies, even found time for dinner and drinks together. "People who try a lot of cases don't have false bravado and don't do a lot of posturing and jerking around," Beck says. "People who don't go to trial do that."

Beck is one of the "best cross-examiners I've ever known," says Bartlit, recalling his partner's methodical dismantling of expert witnesses for Vice-President Al Gore in Florida. But, Bartlit adds, "Phil hasn't lost his virginity—he's still the kid who grew up in Homewood. He still has the ability to trust people, and when he talks to juries, he's talking to them the same way he talks to everyone else."

Last year, Beck was appointed by the Justice Department to represent the government in determining the remedies for Microsoft's violation of antitrust laws. As Beck prepared for trial in November, the government and Microsoft settled, and Beck is now shepherding the deal toward final approval by the court. Most cases probably shouldn't go to trial, he says. But when they do, a lawyer needs "the ability and the courage to pick the areas where he can score the most points."

"Good lawyering counts for a lot," Beck adds, "but it's no guarantee of success."

**JACK GUTHMAN, 63**



**Shefsky & Froelich Ltd.**  
 Zoning and land use

MORE THAN A DECADE AGO, *Crain's Chicago Business* dubbed Jack Guthman "Mr. Insider," citing his unrivaled ability to navigate the city's real estate regulatory process. Guthman doesn't like the title, in part because it hints of backroom deals, but also, one suspects, because it doesn't give his legal skills enough credit. "I don't think of myself as tough," Guthman says. "But I'm not easy."

Guthman made his reputation at what was then Sidley & Austin. In 1994, he surprised the real estate world by moving to the much smaller Shefsky & Froelich. "I may have gained more patience over the years," he says. "You have to understand the process and understand the law, and then add imagination. Often you can get to your goal by going in a second or third direction."

Guthman's representation of the Central Michigan Avenue Association is a case in point. The association initially opposed the city's plan to create a landmark district on Michigan Avenue between Randolph and 11th Streets. Last May, Guthman praised the city for issuing specific guidelines, but then suggested that 9 of the 45 buildings should be removed from the list and their owners allowed to tear them down.

Under other circumstances, though, Guthman digs in his heels—a tactic that has made him anathema to many community groups opposed to development.

Reuben Hedlund, an attorney who has battled Guthman, calls him "a gladiator. He is an arch defender of property rights and a talented and aggressive representative of developers and development."

Guthman expects his clients to trust his tactical instincts. "If they don't respect my opinion," he says, "they shouldn't pay my outrageous hourly rate."

**G. FLINT TAYLOR JR., 55**



**People's Law Office**  
 Civil rights, police brutality,  
 wrongful conviction

G. FLINT TAYLOR JR. AND THE PEOPLE'S Law Office first made their mark in June 1970, filing a suit against Chicago police and Cook County state's attorney Edward V. Hanrahan in the aftermath of the deadly 1969 raid against Black Panther Fred Hampton. Taylor and his colleagues pursued the case for the next 13 years, overcoming recalcitrant judges and uncooperative government witnesses to win a \$1.85-million settlement.

Three decades later, Taylor is still at it, though the stakes are far higher. One case in point: In 1999, he represented one of the Ford Heights Four—four men (two of them on death row) who spent a combined 65 years in prison before being cleared of murder charges. Taylor helped settle their \$36-million suit against Cook County for wrongful conviction and malicious prosecution. "We'll take

cases other people won't," Taylor says.

Taylor opened the People's Law Office in 1969 with a group of lawyers and fellow Northwestern law students. Today it is still going strong, supporting itself with the contingency fees from the police brutality and civil rights cases Taylor and others continue to litigate.

With the war on terrorism, Taylor sees new concerns about civil liberties. "It always starts out as an attack on the most unpopular group of the day, whether it's Communists or Black Panthers or now Arabs," he says. "This is a very important time for people to have the courage to do this kind of work."

**VICKI LAFER ABRAHAMSON, 48 >>**

**Abrahamson Vorachek & Mikva**  
 Employment law

MANY OF VICKI ABRAHAMSON'S CLIENTS want to get even. They've lost their jobs and want to sue their employers for sexual harassment, age or gender bias, or some other form of job discrimination. They may be surprised by what they hear from Abrahamson. "Justice is not what this is about," she will tell them. "It's about a reasonable economic decision."

Abrahamson has built a national reputation for pressing her clients' claims through mediation and negotiation, or, if necessary, by going to trial. She is known for her relentless use of discovery, depositions, and company documents to bolster her cases. Many should be settled without trial, Abrahamson says, but she is more than willing to go the distance. In 1997, Abrahamson filed an age discrimination suit on behalf of a woman who had worked more than 40 years for Riddell Inc., a Chicago-based maker of sports equipment. During mediation, Abrahamson suggested that the woman would accept a settlement of \$100,000. "We couldn't get the offer," she recalls. "One year later, we would have settled for \$150,000 or \$175,000, but we could not get there." So Abrahamson went to trial and won a judgment of more than \$400,000 for the client and another \$400,000 in attorney's fees for herself. The lesson: "When you've got a good case, I don't care if you're \$10,000 apart; you stick to your guns."

Abrahamson, who opened her own practice in 1985, says she has no patience for company attorneys who "kill you with niceness" in settlement talks—but "aren't coming up with any decent dollars."