

New Orleans CITY BUSINESS

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THE BUSINESS NEWSPAPER OF METRO NEW ORLEANS

MARCH 22, 2013

Stephen Kreller

Position: The Kreller Law Firm managing member

Age: 38

Family: single

Education: bachelor's degree in marketing, University of South Alabama; juris doctor, Loyola University College of Law

Nearly three years after the Gulf of Mexico oil spill, 95 percent of Stephen Kreller's caseload is comprised of settlement claims for commercial fisherman, many of them Vietnamese, and cleanup workers.

To date, he has filed more than 3,000 claims on behalf of 1,600 clients — most of whom he says have opted to enter into settlement agreements with BP.

"This case is so time consuming and involved that it requires 100 percent of my time," said Kreller, adding that he meets with about 100 clients per week.

He foresees his firm and those it has partnered with working on the claims for another two to three years. Their specific role is to work with a court-appointed steering committee, which is litigating the claims in federal court.

"We provide them (the steering committee) with expert reports, and we're actively participating in the settlement negotiations as it relates to the commercial fisherman and their claims," he said.

In the past, Kreller helped negotiate claims through the Gulf Coast Claims Facility. It was a more challenging time that Keller said he's pleased to have behind him.

"With any settlement, you have to compromise, but you also have to understand your client's risk moving forward," he said, adding that he enjoys working cases of this magnitude because they present him with opportunities to learn his clients' businesses, gain their trust and help them rebuild their lives.

"I think the best part of this case is handing a check to a client because that's when you start realizing the benefits of all of your hard work," Kreller said. "I enjoy the larger cases like this because it enables me to help people. But also, you get to meet so many people."

Kreller also finds time to network with colleagues and volunteer in the community. He serves as president of the Academy of New Orleans Trial Lawyers, a group of attorneys who meet monthly to discuss civil trial practices. He also mentors about 12 Loyola University students, assisting them with networking and professional guidance.

"It's part of giving back to the community," he said.

—Nayita Wilson

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