



STEPHEN S. KRELLER



Stephen Kreller has dedicated his practice to serving those who have been wronged.

Employing the Law to Restore Lives and Livelihoods

By Haley Freeman

Stephen S. Kreller spent his early years in and around New Orleans. He attended the University of South Alabama. During his sophomore year, he began working as a courier and trial assistant for a national plaintiffs' trial firm in Mobile, Ala. Kreller recalls approaching partner and mentor, Joseph "Buddy" Brown, Jr., to ask about sitting in on a deposition. Instead, he got a front row seat to a multimillion dollar, three week trial and a returned verdict of \$15 million.

"I got to watch the entire process from voir dire of the jury, all the way through the return of a verdict, which was a tremendous experience for a young college student interested in practicing law. From that point forward, I worked with Buddy during his trials as his trial assistant. I also worked with the other partners of the firm during their trials," Kreller said.

This mentor relationship was the beginning of Kreller's career in the law. He went on to attend Loyola University School of Law graduating in 2002. During his law school studies, he clerked for the late Wendell H. Gautier and his law firm.

Kreller had only been practicing for a few years when Hurricane Katrina ravaged New Orleans, leaving over \$100 billion worth of damage in its wake. "I was completely wiped out by the storm. The 17th Street Canal levee broke five blocks from where I was living, and my house was completely flooded."

In Katrina's aftermath, Kreller moved back to Mobile, Ala. to be with family. In those uncertain times, he made the decision to sit for the Alabama bar and subsequently the Georgia bar. Kreller then sat for the New York bar as insurance against future professional disruptions like the one posed by Katrina. Kreller recognized the value of New York's reciprocity with numerous other states, as well as the opportunity his licensure presented in both domestic and international business sectors. His New York license has proved a tremendous asset when representing the interests of domestic clients overseas and European clients doing business in the United States.

"After Hurricane Katrina destroyed my home, I began helping family and friends with claims against their insurance companies," Kreller said. Many were having problems with insurance companies undervaluing claims. Among others, Kreller also represented borrowers in a mortgage fraud case at the New Orleans firm Murphy, Rogers, Sloss & Gambel, APLC.

Murphy Rogers is primarily a defense firm, but Kreller found

himself working with the partners who were representing plaintiffs. "My passion is helping victims of major industrial disasters collect what is owed to them, often from recalcitrant institutions whose obstructive tactics have made settlements difficult or impossible to secure." His work has allowed his clients to recover and rebuild their businesses, and more importantly, their lives.

In September 2009, Kreller left Murphy Rogers to start his own practice. While he maintains a great relationship with his former colleagues and learned much from his experience with them, Kreller was ready to set out on his own and begin choosing his own cases. Today, Kreller represents both corporations and individuals. He specializes in mass tort, multidistrict litigation, environmental law, products liability, consumer fraud, mortgage



Stephen makes optimum use of his resources, both technical and human.

“Clients always come first at The Kreller Law Firm.”



fraud and personal injury and is already distinguished by an impressive win/settlement record.

A few months after he began his solo practice, the MODU Deepwater Horizon oil exploration platform exploded. “It killed 11 people and caused the worst oil disaster in world history,” Kreller explained.

“I formed a partnership with attorney Gerard M. Nolting of Faegre Baker Daniels LLP to help commercial fisherman and related businesses devastated by the oil spill,” Kreller said.

Nolting was a notable attorney who represented plaintiffs in both the Glacier Bay oil disaster of 1987 and the Exxon Valdez spill of 1989. Nolting’s plaintiffs’ team obtained a \$5 billion punitive damage judgment in the Valdez case, the largest in United States history at the time. “We thought with our combined experiences in that niche market, we would be able to help commercial fishermen and related businesses damaged by the BP oil spill.”

The Kreller Law Firm, along with Faegre Baker Daniels LLP and Langston & Lott, PA, now represent over 2,000 commercial fishermen and related businesses in their oil spill claims against BP, Transocean and Halliburton. “One thing that distinguishes us from everyone else is that we are not a class action group; rather, we are a direct action group. We represent individuals and businesses through an individual and personal capacity. We have filed our lawsuits as direct action lawsuits against these defendants. While our cases have been consolidated with the multidistrict litigation for discovery purposes, we are direct action plaintiffs that deal with our clients on an individual and personal basis. We are not the class action lawyers that say, ‘Pick a number, get in line and we will call you at some point in the future when we have a resolution of your claim.’ Regularly, we are in touch with our clients.”

Following the BP oil spill, two avenues of relief were available to victims - claims with the GCCF and claims through litigation. “Originally, we pursued our claim portfolio with the GCCF and Ken Feinberg, [who was] appointed by President Obama to serve as the claims administrator for the Gulf Coast Claims Facility, which was a \$20 billion fund that was set up to process and pay claims for those folks damaged by the oil spill,” Kreller explained. He and Nolting, along with their team of attorneys and experts, spent substantial time in Washington, D.C. working directly with Feinberg in an effort to obtain fair compensation for their fisherman clients. Despite the good faith efforts of Kreller and Nolting to negotiate fair compensation for their clients, the GCCF and Feinberg failed to offer reasonable compensation

to fisherman for their losses and future risks. “The GCCF multipliers were stingy and grossly underestimated the damages to our clients. Although we made great progress with GCCF and Feinberg, and our efforts caused him to increase his multiplier for shrimpers and crabbers and recognize a legitimate property damage interest for oyster leaseholders, ultimately, our clients elected not to resolve their claims through the GCCF and to pursue their claims through litigation.”

After joining the litigation (MDL2179), Kreller, Nolting and their team of attorneys and experts worked with the plaintiffs’ steering committee and BP to negotiate a global settlement. According to Kreller, “For our team, a critically important part of the negotiation process was protecting the interests of our clients and making certain that they were treated fairly and not trampled upon.”

“The most satisfying part of this entire process is actually now, in the settlement process, when I’m handing checks to clients and seeing the results,” Kreller said. He further described the satisfaction he receives from the phone calls of thanks and appreciation from clients whose cases have been resolved and whose lives and livelihoods have been restored.

“Most of our clients have elected to participate in the settlement with BP. If the court finds that Transocean and Halliburton acted in gross negligence, those clients still have viable punitive damage claims against Transocean and Halliburton,” said Kreller.

Sadly, Gerard M. Nolting passed away in October 2012. “I lost a great friend and a partner in the process of this BP case,” Kreller takes comfort in honoring Nolting’s memory by continuing to pursue the favorable resolution for the clients that Nolting fought so hard for during the final days of his career.

Kreller and Nolting did minimal marketing for the BP cases; rather, they built a client base by referrals and word-of-mouth. “It began, for the most part, with one or two clients that agreed with our approach to resolving claims. Then, those clients referred us other clients, and then those clients referred us other clients. It was like the single match that starts the forest fire.”

“I think it is also the level of service that we provide to our clients. Again, we are not class action lawyers,” Kreller said. “We are direct action lawyers. We return phone calls, stay in touch with clients, make ourselves available to clients, visit with clients at their homes, visit with clients at their docks and on their boats. Wherever a client wants us to be, we will be. It is our level of commitment to clients that set us apart from others....Half of our job is just listening to the client tell their story.”

As in the BP case, most of Kreller's clients are generated by referral, and he does little marketing outside of his website. Attorneys choose Kreller due to results he has generated in his handling of past cases.

Often, cases are referred because a firm does not have the resources to take on the case or a large company. If a referring attorney does not have the resources to litigate, Kreller may step in. "If someone refers a case to me, I am happy to work with that attorney in whatever level of involvement they want to have in the case."

Kreller considers the effective use of technology critical to the successful management of complex cases. Many of his cases require the organization of "massive amounts of documents and information. I have fought larger defense firms and I have found that I am able to retrieve documents faster and more efficiently."

Kreller describes himself as a "results-oriented" practitioner. Whether he is representing the interests of the plaintiff or the defendant, he is committed to reaching a favorable resolution.

Kreller attempts to offer his corporate clients the same kind of cost-efficient resolution that he provides in plaintiffs' work. Although he is a trial attorney, he recognizes that litigation is not always in the best interests of his clients, even if it would generate more revenue for his firm. "When I have a corporate client, I size up the claim and try to figure out what is the best and most efficient resolution for that client." Kreller also believes that it is part of his job to help his clients "separate the personal and emotional aspects of an issue from the business aspects of an issue" in order for them to weigh all of their options for resolution.

Kreller would like to see a change in the way large firms manage billable hours, especially with their new associates. He has observed that in many firms, new associates are under pressure to meet high billing quotas in order to advance within the firm. Kreller opined that such practices encourage "fraud and overbilling among attorneys and compromise the integrity of the profession." While he feels fortunate that this was not a part of his early practice experience, he would like to help other young professionals avoid this abuse of the system. According to Kreller, "It is our job to protect the integrity of the profession."

In the aftermath of Katrina and the subsequent BP disaster, Kreller commends the state of Louisiana for the tax credits it has extended to the movie industry, along with other incentives designed to attract new commerce to the state. The recent influx of young entrepreneurs is providing Kreller an opportunity to assist new businesses in their success, thereby contributing to new economic growth.

Kreller's resolve to help others through difficult times was strengthened when his life was disrupted by unforeseen circumstances. His down to earth practice style makes it possible for him to connect with and assist many people.

At A Glance

The Kreller Law Firm

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Practice Areas:

Multidistrict Litigation, Mass Toxic Tort, Environmental Litigation, Products Liability, Personal Injury, Consumer Fraud, Mortgage Fraud, Insurance Litigation, and Complex Tort

Bar Admissions:

- Louisiana, 2003
- Alabama, 2006
- Georgia, 2006
- New York, 2008

Education:

J.D. Loyola University School of Law, 2002

B.S. in Marketing, University of South Alabama, 1998

Professional Memberships:

- Academy of New Orleans Trial Lawyers
President, 2012 - Present
- Trial Lawyer College, Ranch Club Member
- Louisiana Association for Justice, Member
- Alabama Association for Justice, Member
- American Association for Justice, Member
- The Million Dollar Advocates Forum, Member

Community Activities:

Loyola University, New Orleans, La. Executive Mentor Program
Student Mentor, 2012 – Present.

Professional Awards:

- Super Lawyers, Louisiana Rising Star, 2012
- New Orleans CityBusiness, Leadership in Law, 2012 and 2013
- Louisiana Life Magazine, Top Young Attorney in Louisiana Rising Star, 2012



Like many others, Stephen endured the troubles of Hurricane Katrina but used it to invigorate his law practice.