

JANUARY 21, 2009

Supplement to the Los Angeles and San Francisco

Daily Journal

www.dailyjournal.com

20



UNDER 40

he state of the legal business is dismal. Revenues are down. Clients are complaining about the bills. Firms want their lawyers to be better rainmakers. There's no time for pro bono work — not to mention a personal life!

Set aside those concerns for a moment, and consider this year's list of the Daily Journal's 20 top lawyers under 40. Suddenly, the future doesn't look so bleak.

20 UNDER 40



GIDEON KRACOV | 37

Environmental law
Sole Practitioner
LOS ANGELES

Soon after Los Angeles' voters passed Proposition 65 in 2004, authorizing up to \$500 million in bonds to clean the city's water, Gideon Kracov received an appointment to the oversight committee. In many ways, it was a testament to the respect he has cultivated in the local community.

In the fractured, highly polarized world of environmental politics, Kracov has managed to obtain credibility with all parties, perhaps the highest currency. In part, he owes this to his decision to work on environmental issues from all sides, including the defense, plaintiffs, in the government and as a citizen, since he returned to Southern California after law school in 1995.

"He spends a lot of time going out and meeting people and meeting with people," said Richard Drury of Lozeau Drury in San Francisco, who has worked closely with him. "The defendants know him and respect him, even if he's on the other side. I think they know he's a realist and can see the other side."

In 1995, Kracov started at the regionally connected firm formerly known as Weston Benshoof, now Alston & Bird. After representing Fortune 500 companies in toxic tort defense work for two years, he jumped to small plaintiffs' side firm Rose Klein & Marias, also located in downtown Los Angeles.

In one of the most prominent lawsuits there, Kracov obtained \$2.5 million for families whose children had attended schools next to a chromium-plating factory in Bell Gardens and were suffering from leukemia and other fatal illnesses. He also helped shut down an oil refinery in Santa Fe Springs that had drawn heavy complaints from its neighbors about air pollution.

Those experiences left a searing impression on Kracov who "realized that environmental law could be a successful way to empower

these communities, and to improve the quality of life in these communities," he said.

After five years there, Kracov joined the Los Angeles city attorney's office, spearheading the civil litigation for the Environmental Justice Enforcement and Compliance Team, which cracked down on industrial polluters. While at the office, he helped negotiate a \$168-million settlement between the city and county of Los Angeles and the state of California over the amount of trash that flows into the Ballona Wetlands.

In 2004, Kracov rented space from his former Rose, Klein & Marias firm and struck out on his own. He dedicates a third of his practice to contingency environmental justice cases and the rest to advising solid waste and recycling firms on environmental compliance matters.

His seems to owe his success to the strength of his commitments to issues that matter to him. In his personal life, he and wife recently adopted two brothers through the local foster system. He serves on the board of directors of the Salvadoran American Leadership Education Fund and the board of directors of the Los Angeles Grand Performances.

More recently, his law practice has thrust him into the fight over the impact of the growing goods-movement industry, driven by the expansion of the Los Angeles Port. In several lawsuits, he has taken on cities in eastern Los Angeles, where air pollution is growing as more trucks and railcars pass through towing goods. In one of his most high-profile, ongoing battles, Kracov is fighting to obtain greater regulation of railroad emissions in California.

"One of the things I've realized is that to be able to go to court to obtain tangible benefits for people really is part of the American way," he said.