

Friday, July 9, 2010

Litigation & Corporate Law

A Conversation with James Arnold

President | James E. Arnold & Associates LPA
BUSINESS FIRST OF COLUMBUS

A native of Boston, Mass., Arnold has practiced law in Ohio for his entire career. He specializes on litigation, including business torts and medical negligence. He graduated from Capital University Law School and started his practice at Vorys Sater Seymour and Pease LLP in Columbus. He later joined the firm that became known as Clark Perdue Arnold and Scott. In 2008, he decided to launch his own practice in Columbus. The 53-year-old holds a bachelor's degree in business administration from Ohio State University.



Janet Adams | Business First

You started your own firm in 2008. What made you take the leap?

I left Vorys Sater Seymour and Pease because I was given the proverbial “offer you can’t refuse.” At Clark Perdue Arnold and Scott, I had the chance to work more from the plaintiffs’ side of the courtroom. After several years, I found myself migrating back into more commercial and business litigation for both the defense and plaintiffs, so after a few years it simply made more sense to strike out on my own.

James Arnold is in year three of building up his Columbus law practice. One way he’s drummed up business is to represent other firms’ clients when they have disputes that create a conflict of interest

What are some of the larger verdicts you’ve seen in the past few years? Anything surprise you?

As an initial matter, I reject the notion of “runaway juries” or the concept that our jury system somehow results in an excessive number of outrageous verdicts. Most of our juries are conservative and, when it appears they are not, there is a reason. We simply hear about larger verdicts because it’s just not newsworthy to print something about a defense verdict where nothing is recovered. Beyond that, I think large verdicts result, in many circumstances, because one of the parties has failed to properly assess their risks. Over the past several years, we have had multiple several-million-dollar plaintiffs’ verdicts, most of which have been the result of “denial,” meaning one party did not realistically consider the facts. In fact, in two recent cases, we have had remarkable differences between pretrial settlement positions and the jury verdicts. In a recent personal injury case, the defendant offered \$60,000 to settle – and we obtained a verdict of \$4.25 million. The case before that was a commercial dispute in which the defendant offered \$70,000 – and we recovered \$4.75 million.

Some of your clients are lawyers from other firms with a conflict of interest in a case. What’s the secret to making these types of relationships work?

Our relationships work because we have very few institutional clients. Rather than servicing a particular client repeatedly, we prefer to have as our clients, if you will, law firms that may have one or more clients that have disputes between themselves. Under those circumstances, other firms will refer an institutional client to us. We are careful to return the client after the engagement is over.