



Nick Even, who specializes in product liability law, began his career with Bowman and Brooke as a legal assistant during his senior year of college at MSU.

GOAL ORIENTED

Photos by Robert Chase

Attorney helps spur growth of a ‘Fiasco’

BY TOM KIRVAN

It's called the "Frozen Fish Fiasco" and the mid-winter event at the once downtrodden Clark Park in southwest Detroit has become a rallying point and a source of pride for Nick Even, a product liability attorney with Bowman and Brooke in Bloomfield Hills.

The event, thanks in large part to Even and his hockey buddy Dominic Riggio, has proven to be anything but a financial fiasco, offering a bit of good news for a Detroit neighborhood community that over the years has suffered mightily, emblematic of the greater economic and societal challenges that the city currently faces.

Scheduled for January 25, 2014, at the Clark Park Ice Rink, the fifth annual "Fiasco" will feature a series of outdoor hockey games pitting various "amateur teams from different youth hockey

organizations in the surrounding Metropolitan Detroit area against one another," culminating with a contest between "the organizing team, the Cedar Point Carp, and the Faurecia Whalers," according to Even. Proceeds from the event will be earmarked for the Clark Park Coalition, a nonprofit organization formed more than 20 years ago to provide funding support for the recreational site.

"The need for funding has been compounded by the tough times the city has faced and continues to face, the thrusting of additional staggering

expenses (for Clark Park utilities) on the Coalition, and the anticipation that, when the city begins making additional cuts, city contributions to recreational programs will be one of the first made," Even says.

"These financial realities have provided all the more reason for us to become involved, hoping that the more money we raise each year will help preserve a park that is a bright spot in the neighborhood, a place where kids and adults can go to enjoy recreational activities," he notes.

In 1991, a group of concerned parents and other local residents banded together to form the Clark Park Coalition after the park was closed due to the city's financial crisis, some 22 years before Detroit hung on the precipice of bankruptcy. In partnership with the City of Detroit Recreation Department, the Coalition has been able to keep the park open to provide "four seasons worth of annual

programming for thousands of youth, including outdoor ice hockey and skating in the winter and free lunches to more than 100 youth daily throughout the summer,” according to Anthony Benavides, center director of the Clark Park Recreation Department. In short, it serves as the “town square” to the Detroit neighborhood, while doubling as a “popular meeting place for family picnics and gatherings,” Benavides says.

The park’s importance to the neighborhood is symbolic of a greater city-wide need, according to Even, a product of Detroit Catholic Central and Michigan State University.

“In a small sense, we are doing our best to help keep a park open and alive,” Even says. “In a larger sense, we see this annual project as something that needs to happen all over the city if Detroit is to return to good health. Everyone needs to invest in Detroit’s turnaround. I’m confident it can happen, but only if people are willing to get involved at the grassroots level.”

Even and Riggio, who serve as co-chairs of the hockey extravaganza, are upping the ante this year, hoping to raise \$40,000 at the 2014 Frozen Fish Fiasco. It’s an ambitious goal, Even readily admits, more than four times what the event raised last January.

“We see the need to step it up in terms of fund-raising,” Even says, noting that an event website has been created (www.frozenfishfiasco.com) to encourage donations. “Clark Park has the only outdoor ice rink in the city and maintaining it is costly. We’re soliciting sponsors and donors, and we want to make a real impact for the Clark Park Coalition. Every penny donated to and raised by the Fiasco is tax-exempt and goes directly to the Coalition.”

Even’s full-scale involvement in the project is typical of his overall level of commitment to good causes.

“Let’s just say that I don’t do much in life half-heartedly,” Even says with a grin. “If I decide to become involved, I put everything I have into it. There is no satisfaction for me in doing it halfway.”

A graduate of the University of Detroit Mercy School of Law, Even over the past seven years has volunteered considerable time at crosstown Wayne State Law School, coaching the National Trial Advocacy Team there. His efforts, he says, have been a “labor of love” and have had the side benefit of keeping his trial skills sharp.

“It has been a wonderful experience to be involved with the Wayne students, working with them on nights and weekends as they prepare for competitions,” Even says. “I became involved by assisting Larry Mann, who coached the team before I assumed the role. I really benefited by learning at Larry’s side.”

Mann, managing partner of Bowman and Brooke in Bloomfield Hills, has acquired a national reputation as a trial expert and was honored by Wayne Law several years ago as a “Treasure of Detroit.” He, in turn, considers Even one of the “rising stars” at Bowman and Brooke, a firm specializing in product liability work with nine offices coast to coast.

“Nick’s commitment to his cases and his clients, and his involvement in volunteer work are truly to be admired,” says Mann. “He puts his heart into everything he does.”

A resident of Royal Oak, Even inherited his work ethic from his parents, Denise and Greg, who have been married for 40 years. His father, uncle, and grandfather founded the Flor-Dri Supply Co. in Detroit, a business where his younger sister, Paige, now works in marketing.

“I worked there during the summers while growing up, but I always wanted to pursue a career in the law,” Even says.

After graduating from MSU, Even worked for a year before enrolling in the evening program at UDM School of Law, switching to the full time day program a year later.

“I really loved law school,” Even says. “I got involved in student government, law review, and moot court. I just ate it up. Fortunately, my education has continued at Bowman and Brooke, where I’ve had the privilege of working with some brilliant attorneys who have mentored me over the years.”

Even, not surprisingly, has developed his own legal prowess, earning recognition from the Michigan Defense Trial Counsel with the Golden Gavel Award and the Detroit Metropolitan Bar Association with the Pro Bono Award.

The latter honor was bestowed upon Even in 2004, during his third year of practice. He was called to find a legal remedy for a Detroit woman who had been swindled out of \$20,000 by an unscrupulous contractor.

“By the time she reached out for legal help, it was too late,” Even explains. “The contractor was supposed to build her a new porch, but after he framed it, he took off with her money and left. There wasn’t a legal remedy for us to pursue, so we decided the best thing we could do was finish the project ourselves.”

Which Even and two other lawyers did over the course of two weeks, earning rave reviews in the process.

“I’m not a handyman by any stretch, but when we were done with the porch, one of the lady’s neighbors wanted to hire us for a home project,” Even says. “That made us feel pretty good.” **M**



With hockey sticks in hand, Nick Even (left) and Dominic Riggio have helped give a lift to the fortunes of Detroit’s Clark Park.