

TIM REULAND

Making a Difference in Injured Clients' Lives

by Dan Rafter

AURORA—Large settlements for injured clients draw headlines, but Timothy J. Reuland recognizes that personal injury cases are about much more than money.

Reuland, a principal in the Aurora firm of **Speers Reuland & Cibulskis PC**, knows much more is at stake for injured clients and their families than a financial settlement.

Reuland, one of the foremost personal injury attorneys in northern Illinois, has a long list of

just as much as fractured bones. I think it is a mistake to cap non-economic damages.”

Reuland has represented dozens of injured people over the years, securing large settlements that provided for families who, through no fault of their own, lost their source of income.

“I try to tell them what to expect,” Reuland says. “I want them to know how the process works and what a likely outcome might be.

“In order to do his job, he had to be able to get around the floor of the company, monitor the flow of inventory, finished goods, etc., which he was able to do,” Reuland explains.

One November day as Brown was driving a specially equipped van that allowed his wheelchair to be fixed in place of the driver’s seat, he collided with a semi-tractor trailer that pulled out in front of him near Montgomery, Illinois.

He suffered disabling injuries that left him unable to rise from the wheelchair unassisted. He was referred to Reuland, who immediately recognized his challenge: How do you prove that someone who was disabled before an accident suffered even more disability?

In the workmanlike way that has impressed the judiciary and his colleagues, Reuland set out on a systematic proof of what Brown had lost.

An injured person, he says, is like the hub of a wheel. His family, co-workers, and friends are like spokes emanating from that hub. Those are the people who tell the story of what kind of life the injured person had before the accident and what dramatic changes have resulted because of the injuries.

Reuland was able to demonstrate that Brown’s mobility was so severely impaired by the accident that he could no longer get in and out of his wheelchair by himself. Because of the increased disability, Brown lost his job, his ability to earn a living, and his self-respect. The trucking company settled the case for seven figures rather than risk a trial.

“Tim always did what he said he was going to do. He was kind and caring. I took a strong liking to him,” says Brown.

“Tim didn’t seem to be only about the money,” Brown adds. “As we went further along in our case, Tim made sure to always bring me into the picture when it was time to make the important decisions. He always asked for my input and thoughts. He always explained to me the pros and cons of the case. He always clearly explained the issues. He seemed like a real person.”

“Advocate” to Reuland is a cherished and serious obligation and one he takes to heart for every client he represents.

“When it comes to personal injury law, I’ve always felt that this is an area that’s a real outlet for compassion,” he says. “It’s an opportunity to help people who have had their life somehow



clients who entered his office depressed, afraid, and numb, but left with hope and the belief that they had hired a strong advocate in their battle for equitable compensation.

“These accidents are like lightning striking in someone’s life. This is not the standard march of aging that we have time to prepare for; these are life-changing events that forever alter a person’s life and that of his or her family,” Reuland says.

“These injuries often involve multiple surgeries and hospitalizations, rehabilitation, a loss of income and sometimes even a loss of the ability to work again. I worry not just about the person’s income and the impact on the family, but also the psychological well-being of the victim. There is a period of profound adjustment, often accompanied by a loss of self-respect. These losses deserve compensation

Some have unreasonable expectations, perhaps driven by an emotional component. Others have no expectation of a favorable outcome.”

When they leave his office, they know what to expect and what the process will entail, all explained carefully and with compassion.

That honest, open approach makes him a special attorney in the eyes of many peers and clients.

Outlet for Compassion

Gus Brown is one of those clients. Ten years after his horrific accident, he remains close to Reuland, referring clients to him and communicating with him frequently.

Brown was a vice president of a small toy manufacturing company and was already disabled, using a wheelchair for mobility.

upended by injury. I feel that it is an honor to work with people who trust you to help them get back on their feet, help them solve the real problems that injury—serious injury—produces: loss of income and sudden and potentially catastrophic medical bills. Helping people resolve these issues has always been a very rewarding side of my practice.”

Reuland becomes so much a part of his clients’ lives that he feels a kinship with them that continues past the case’s conclusion.

“During the case, I try to stay in touch with them and monitor their medical progress. I live with their ups and downs, setbacks, and progress until we reach a point where I know it is appropriate to move forward with the case,” he says.

That point generally comes when no further medical advances are possible and the full extent of the physical, emotional, and personal loss is irreversible.

“Compassion is what I keep in mind at all times. Part of what personal injury lawyers can do is give their clients a sense of how this will likely play out.”

He adds: “The problem with the law is that it translates human experience into a legal framework. And while that is what keeps order, sometimes in that translation, important factors are lost.”

Honing His Own Style

A 1973 graduate of the Northwestern University School of Law, Reuland has built a long legal career out of exceeding the expectations of his clients.

A specialist in vehicle and trucking accidents, defective products, and slip-and-fall cases, he has become a favorite of clients who want an attorney with a sharp legal mind and the humanity to help them work through a difficult time.

Reuland almost didn’t enter the field of law. As an undergraduate at Loyola University, Reuland earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in philosophy in 1970.

Recognizing that it would be difficult to find work in philosophy, he turned to law, which still allowed him to use his training in philosophy.

“During my philosophy studies, I had to do a lot of careful reading and writing,” Reuland recalls. “I received training in logic, training in argument and training in dealing with concepts and their implications and limits. All of this is readily transferable to the law.”

Highly respected Aurora attorney Charles Thompson says Reuland was forged in the competitive crucible of an Aurora firm with a “gladiatorial” competitiveness. Reid, Ochsenschlager, Murphy and Hupp was a large firm for Aurora, with about 18 members,

and known as a dynamic trial firm that prized favorable verdicts, Thompson says.

“We created trial lawyers there because we had many opportunities to try cases,” Thompson says.

“I trained a lot of them, and Tim was one of the best. He had a keen intellect and a presence that was just superb. Good trial lawyers have a sort of brashness, and Tim was surrounded by strong personalities. He honed his ability and his own style. A good trial lawyer also has sincerity and grittiness about him and Tim has those qualities. He is the definition of a Leading Lawyer.”

Impressive Results

Since going into law, Reuland has never had any regrets. He’s built a remarkably varied career, voted by his peers as a Leading Lawyer in personal injury and commercial law.

For more than three decades, Reuland has represented clients in wrongful death, product safety, professional negligence, and vehicle crash cases. He has tackled business and

organizations include Hesed House, a service center for the homeless, and the Marmion Academy Board of Trustees.

Because of his long string of courtroom successes, Reuland is in demand as an author and guest lecturer. He’s written chapters in *Proving and Disproving Damages in Personal Injury Cases* published by the Illinois Institute of Continuing Legal Education and in the *Workers’ Compensation Notebook* published by the Illinois Trial Lawyers Association. He has published on damages in wrongful death cases in the *Illinois Bar Journal*. He has spoken at seminars held by the Illinois Trial Lawyers Association, Illinois Institute of Continuing Legal Education, and Kane County Bar Association.

“My practice is in two parts. I do a lot of personal injury work for plaintiffs and I do a lot of commercial litigation,” he says. “This means that no two days are ever the same. It also means that I’m always learning something. There aren’t too many careers in which you can say both of those things.”



Reuland at the 2009 Kane County Bar Association annual dinner with partners: Keith Johnson, Robert Speers, and Julie Cibulskis.

commercial cases, in which he litigates shareholder and partnership disputes, corporate dissolutions, contested wills, and contract cases.

Not surprisingly, Reuland has garnered impressive results during his career. These include a \$4 million verdict with partner Bob Speers for a young man injured in a car crash; \$1.3 million for a worker who lost four fingertips in a punch-press accident; and \$1.85 million for another man injured in an auto accident. He won \$3 million for two elderly plaintiffs seriously injured by a drunk driver and \$1.3 million in the death of a 23-year-old man killed in a collision with a semi-truck.

Reuland has also found time to help his community. He received the Kane County Bar Association’s Community Service award in 2004 because of his support and involvement with various community organizations. These

Reuland has always enjoyed being a courtroom lawyer and appreciates all the drama and excitement that goes with it. He likes arguing in the courtroom, researching cases before they go to trial, and taking depositions.

The commercial side has challenges as well, Reuland says, because of the passion and complexity intertwined in the litigation.

“These cases are often intellectually challenging and challenging to your advocacy skills,” Reuland says. “They don’t fall into any particular patterns like injury cases tend to do.”

“The fun part is that I get to learn so many different things. In product liability cases, I’m often exposed to new engineering concepts. I get exposed to mechanical things that I’d never thought about before. I’ve learned about how businesses work and the many ways in

which people make their livings. I've been amazed at some of the unusual work that people do."

Reuland's desktop is a good indication of the varied nature of his career. At any one time, it might hold papers relating to a defectively designed lawnmower that amputated part of a client's foot. It might have paperwork relating to a commercial dispute between two banks. Or it might hold statements regarding a dispute between shareholders in a small corporation, or paperwork involving a battle between heirs over an estate.

"In the kind of work that I do, you see people who have some kind of significant problem in their lives. This is when you learn a lot about people."

Praise from the Bench

Reuland's clients aren't the only ones who appreciate his legal skills. Judges before whom Reuland has argued cases also understand his talent.

Recently retired Sixteenth Judicial Circuit Court Judge Michael Colwell has known Reuland since their days at Marmion Academy in Aurora.

"Tim is a people person," Colwell says, "and he uses that in combination with a high level of legal competence and integrity. He is always prepared and he always knows the issue. But he is a man of great integrity as well. When he is arguing a case, if he runs across a case that is on point but contrary to his side, he will inform the court. He has a good sense of people and an outstanding understanding of the human condition."

Retired Judge John Countryman saw Reuland in action in the courtroom while Countryman was a judge and when he was an attorney working with and opposite Reuland. Countryman appreciates Reuland's calming demeanor in the courtroom and the hard work that he puts into his cases before trials start.

"Tim is an excellent lawyer," Countryman says. "But there's more to it than that. He also has a very vibrant personality. He represents his clients so well. He's a hard worker and someone who is just a fine person."

Reuland's success also comes from only taking cases in which he feels he has enough knowledge to properly represent a client.

"I have certain skill sets that have to do with knowing how to prepare a case for trial and trying the case. I try to limit my practice to cases where those skills will come into play and where I know enough about the substantive law to develop the facts in light of the law to properly present them to the judge and jury," he says.

"I don't do criminal work. I don't do divorce

work. While I have trial lawyer skills, I only apply those skills in areas in which I am comfortable enough with the substantive law so that I know I can do a good job."

Brown says he and Reuland still stay in touch. "He'll still call me up to ask me how I'm doing. There aren't many attorneys who do that. I feel fortunate to have met him and to have had him as my attorney." ■