

Girardi & Keese

When famed legal researcher Erin Brockovich

needed a trial attorney, she went to Tom Girardi. Brockovich chose Girardi because he is a winner, but also because he and his law firm, Girardi & Keese, are compassionate fighters for fairness.

Girardi, who along with attorney Walter Lack tried the Erin Brockovich case (Anderson [vs. PG&E](#)) and won a \$333 million settlement for 650 residents of Hinkley, California, jokes that when he started his firm in 1965 he had two \$500 cases and some small ones, too. *He* isn't being flippant. His unassuming nature is as natural as his smile and as authentic as his sense of duty and compassion. Tom Girardi cares about people.

Although his firm's first years held a variety of cases, including who ran the red light, why did someone slip and fall - just about anything the new practice could tackle - Girardi began to steer a course guided by his ideals. As a boy watching "Perry Mason" and "The Defenders" on television, Girardi was drawn to the romance of the law, that it could protect the innocent and level the playing field when people were fighting for their rights against much stronger foes. Girardi's



caseload began to reflect his concern for people's plights and their struggle to surmount the odds.

Acclaim came in 1969. Girardi made history by winning California's first-ever million-dollar verdict in a medical malpractice lawsuit. Rather than the firm's 15 minutes of fame, this was the beginning of a continuing trend Celebrated for his skill, determination and hard-won victory, the attorney began to forge his reputation as a trial lawyer who can take on the big guys and win. Other law firms started to bring him cases.

Girardi teamed up with Robert Keese and Richard Crane in 1975 to form *Girardi, Keese and Crane*. Crane, who left in 1990, has been the only defection in the tight-knit firm's history. All of the more than 30 attorneys who are members of the firm, including partner Keese, began there as law clerks. Girardi's brother, Jack Girardi, came to the firm in 1974. Jim Croft and Jim O'Callahan have both been with Girardi & Keese since 1981.

It was in the 1980s that the firm initiated its representation of 625 aircraft workers of the former Lockheed Corp. (now Lockheed Martin Corp.). Girardi & Keese's exceptional efforts led to a series of trials against major chemical companies for failing to warn workers of the hazards of their products. Girardi overcame extraordinary procedural obstacles and had to battle against the resources of some of the biggest names in corporate America. The series of trials against five petrochemical manufacturers culminated in a \$785 million verdict in 1998.

The awards are huge, but so is the effort put forth by Girardi and Keese. The \$785 million Lockheed verdict came after previous awards of \$10.6 million, \$4.5 million and \$20 million, all related to the same case. The trials have lasted from four to nine months and jury deliberations have gone from one to three months.

Girardi's zeal to see justice done is matched by the strength of his firm and its willingness to persevere for a righteous cause. According to Girardi, "corporate

plaintiffs' lawyers." No law firm has ever done what Girardi & Keese did for the Lockheed workers. The firm forked out more than \$15 million in expenses for the five trials long before it ever even hoped to see any money.

The firm, which has earned a reputation as Los Angeles County's king of the class action lawsuit, works on the cutting edge of trial work. Girardi is now asked to review almost every major case that involves abuses by big business or exposure to toxic majority of its cases are brought to the firm by other attorneys.

In addition to its reputation it complex toxic tort cases, Girardi and Keese is held in high esteem within the legal profession for its expertise with intricate patent infringement cases and actions against big insurance companies. According to Girardi, many insurance companies were unscrupulous following the 1994 Northridge earthquake and evaded their responsibilities to their clients. Girardi, a champion of justice, sees the insurers' behavior as perverse. "Often, they had to spend \$5 to avoid paying a client 50 cents, they would spend the \$5." Through the efforts of Girardi and Keese, many who suffered grievous losses in the natural disaster did not have to be subjected to further damages at the hands of their insurance companies.

The Los Angeles law firm also focuses on the Hollywood film studios. Girardi & Keese is challenging Tinseltown's archaic accounting system, whereby even the most successful movies are deemed unprofitable. The firm, which represents

works or fraudulently limit profit participation, is representing the estate of former New Orleans, Louisiana, District Attorney Jim Garrison and taking on all the major Hollywood studios in a billion-dollar case.

But for Girardi it isn't about the money. It's about justice. He says that if they paid him twice as much to defend the corporate polluters and bamboozlers he couldn't do it. Girardi & Keese have won billions in jury awards, but more than the cash, it is that the judgements make an impact for fairness. Girardi and his colleagues



At the groundbreaking of the Albert H Girardi advocacy Center at Loyola Law School Los Angeles, are (left to right) Architect Frank O Gerhy, Tom Girardi and

are gratified that these actions have caused companies to stop polluting and take other actions to safeguard the public.

Victory in these cases often comes down to which side has the better lawyer. Nearly all cases that go to trial are close. If there is no liability the case is thrown out; if liability is overwhelming, the defense will settle. Girardi says, "maybe it isn't what the lady (Justice) had in mind when she put on the blindfold, but the better lawyer wins."

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Girardi knows that justice is best served by a good lawyer. Considered a master at reading and working a jury, Girardi is proud of his ability to tell a story. He communicates with a jury not by using forms of condescending gamesmanship, but through his humanity and honest sense of compassion for the underdog. Girardi resonates with juries. He knows the law and can fashion points of evidence into a tale that people can understand and relate to. They trust him.

Prominent attorneys and judges have called Girardi the most affable guy in the world and a consummate gentleman. The soft-spoken attorney decries the lack of civility that has crept into the legal profession. He maintains that a contentious attitude is not good for clients or the case. Girardi & Keese brings a sense of gentleness, rather than belligerence, to the practice of law.

Too often, trial attorneys are portrayed in a less than favorable light. According to Girardi this is largely so because they are defending the rights of individuals against powerful foes that use their money and influence to generate negative publicity to discredit the lawyers.

Trial lawyers are the people's last line of defense against fraud and abuse committed by larger, stronger and richer entities. Girardi & Keese is dedicated to defending people's rights. Girardi's unassuming smile and

the legal world.

Girardi is a past president of the American Board of Trial Advocates (ABOTA), a position for which he had to be endorsed by members of the bench he had appeared before and the members of the board. He is also a member of the prestigious Inner Circle of Advocates, which is limited to the top 100 trial lawyers in the United States, the International Academy of Trial Lawyers and has been named trial lawyer of the year by the Los Angeles Trial Lawyers, the Lawyers for Public Justice and the ABOTA.

California Law Business' October 30, 2000 issue, in naming the 100 most influential lawyers in California, placed Thomas V. Girardi in the top 10, along with the likes of Gov. Gray Davis, former U.S. Secretary of State Warren Christopher and California State Supreme Court Chief Justice Ronald George.

Tom Girardi's intellectual acumen, legal expertise and willingness to work as hard as necessary to prevail for his clients have earned him many rewards. Yet the man that juries trust is not the legal eagle, but the honest, caring individual. He speaks lovingly of his wife, Erika; his son Matthew, who is following in his father's legal footsteps; and his daughters, Jacqueline, a gourmet chef graduate of the Culinary Institute of New York; and Jennifer, who runs Quatrain, an exclusive Los Angeles furniture and antique store.

Not one to take pride in himself, Girardi is definitely proud of his family. He is the main donor for the new Albert H. Girardi Advocacy Center at his alma mater, the Loyola Law School, Los Angeles. The center is named after Girardi's father, who after retirement in 1976 at age 65, came to help run his son's law practice, which he continues to do.

Despite Erin Brockovich and multimillion-dollar verdicts, it's not glamour that keeps Tom Girardi going. It's goodness.