

Work from representing pro-basketball stars

Court to arguing a client's case, this grad finds there's an unmistakable link

Howard Soifer (Christianity Class, 1977) takes a special interest when Portland Trailblazers basketball star Steve Smith takes to the floor. Soifer, a shareholder and partner with the law firm of Loomis Ewert Parsley Davis and Gotting, P.C., in Lansing, Mich., represents Smith, a former Michigan State University star and Olympian.

Overlooking Lansing from the ninth floor of the Accident Fund Building, Soifer's office is a melting pot of sports,



HOWARD SOIFER

Michigan State University memorabilia, and remnants from his New York background. From his MSU Spartans office chair, Soifer can alternately reach boxes of autographed Steve Smith athletic shoes, used for charity events, or to his seat from the renovated Yankee Stadium.

As he pours through the papers on his computer-less desk, Soifer can rest his eyes on photographs and lithographs of Yankee Stadium and his hero, baseball legend Mickey Mantle.

Growing up in the Bronx, Soifer always knew he wanted to be a lawyer.

"It seemed a profession I'd be very comfortable in, something I would enjoy very much and be proud to be a part of," Soifer said. That desire was solidified in undergraduate school at Long Island University when he was able to see an admired teacher, Leo Pfeffer, a lawyer and leading authority on issues dealing with the separation of church and state, argue before the U.S. Supreme Court — an experience that propelled him into the law.

Active in the legal arena and in the community, Soifer was recently honored for combining those two elements of his life. For some time, Soifer has served as general counsel for the Impression 5 Science Center, a hands-on, science-oriented facility in Lansing for children of all ages.

Recently, Soifer was given the 2000 Community Service Award by the non-profit organization for his service to the center.

The attention was unexpected and Soifer was thrilled with the award. "I was very humbled and surprised that I was the

recipient of this year's award," he said. "I was really honored."

Today, that award graces Soifer's office, as does a special proclamation praising Soifer for his work that is signed by Michigan Gov. John Engler (Wing Class, 1982) and State Sen. Dianne Byrum.

When Soifer entered law school, Cooley was just a year old. Law schools around the country were packed and Soifer was on several waiting lists. Soifer's brother-in-law encouraged him to apply to Cooley, even though he'd only heard about it in the newspapers. Ultimately, Soifer made the trip and was offered a seat in the January 1974 class. But Lansing was just a temporary stop — or so Soifer thought.

"I had every intention of returning to New York after law school," he said. But in the fall of 1976, Soifer found himself helping current Chief Ingham County Circuit Court Judge Peter Houk in his bid for the Ingham County prosecutor's job. Houk won, and upon graduation, Soifer accepted a job in his office as an assistant county prosecutor. He rose to the position of Principal Trial Attorney within two years, trying the gamut of cases. The most notorious case he was involved in was *People v. Francine Hughes*, a murder case that gained national attention with the release of the movie, "The Burning Bed."

In January 1983, Soifer moved on to a six-person Lansing law firm, becoming a named partner in two years. In 1986, however, the firm broke up, and Soifer and his family took that opportunity to return to New York.

After two years in New York, he decided he really missed Michigan, and returned to work in Lansing with the Loomis Firm. He is particularly proud of his 10-year relationship with Steve Smith and his family. Soifer and his partner, Jack Davis, engineered the deal between Smith and MSU when Smith donated \$2.5 million to build the Clara Bell Smith Student Athlete Academic Center and created a scholarship. Smith eventually donated an additional \$600,000 so that the scholarship will fund one student each year from Pershing High School in Detroit through four years of college at Michigan State. Soifer also represents MSU basketball great Mateen Cleaves, and has worked closely with such stars as Glenn Robinson of the Milwaukee Bucks, Andre Reisen of the Oakland Raiders, and others. ■