

# member Spotlight



**Russell Yankwitt, Esq.**

**Tejash:** How long have you been a member of the WCBA and what are some of your contributions?

**Russell:** I've been involved with the WCBA for the past 3 years and currently serve on the Nominating Committee and Grievance Committee. I also sit on the board of the Westchester County Bar Foundation.

**Tejash:** What is your current job and practice area?

**Russell:** I am the managing partner of a White Plains-based litigation firm Yankwitt LLP. I litigate commercial matters of all kinds, including contract and partnership disputes, employment and shareholder lawsuits, insurance coverage disputes, ADA litigations, and premises liability cases. I represent individuals and organizations of all sizes, from Fortune 500 companies to small family-owned businesses. I also am regularly retained by Westchester and New York City law firms to collaborate on their high-stakes trials throughout the State of New York.

In this feature, Tejash V. Sanchala, Esq., interviews WCBA members about their experiences and insights. Tejash is a former WCBA Board Member, Co-Chair of the WCBA Employment Law and Law Day Committees and a member of the WCBA Nominating Committee. He welcomes any comments and suggestions for future columns.

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**Tejash:** What made you start your own practice?

**Russell:** I had been working in New York City for years, and while they were tremendous years of growth for me as a lawyer, the commute and the long hours were hard on my family. By 2009, I had transitioned to a Westchester firm, but wanted more control over the types of cases on which I worked. I had a young son and had just adopted a baby girl from Taiwan; I wanted to spend more time with my family. That's when I started Yankwitt LLP at my kitchen table with my laptop, a telephone, and tremendous support from my wife Debbie.

I quickly discovered that working in Westchester enabled me to tap into two legal markets. I could continue working on New York City cases that were "too small" for big New York City law firms, because the low overhead of a Westchester office afforded me the ability to charge more competitive rates. Additionally, with both a federal and state courthouse, Westchester had an active litigation docket, but few law firms that focused specifically on

litigation, especially for federal and complex state court cases. Yankwitt LLP, which is comprised of seasoned litigators who have clerked, prosecuted and trained at top firms, filled a significant gap in the Westchester bar. Now in our 10th year, we have handled more than 1,200 cases, which translates to average growth of more than 25 percent per year and a total gross revenue increase of 1500 percent since inception.

**Tejash:** What is one of your favorite legal success stories?

**Russell:** I have two favorites, the first was a bet-the-company case that was won at trial and the second, more recent case was of the same magnitude but for an individual, which was won with research and motion practice.

Several years ago, we represented Triboro Quilt Manufacturing Corporation, a 90-year-old company that was founded by our client's grandfather. Triboro filed for copyright infringement and breach of contract, and the defendant filed a counterclaim for breach of contract and misapprop-

priations. Yankwitt LLP was hired to assist the company's existing law firm at a two week trial. The jury found for Triboro on all counts, which saved Triboro's business.

The second matter was a wrongful death case arising out of a car accident in which the plaintiff claimed that our client, who had owned the car years prior, had a duty to warn the decedent about certain defects in the car. That case was dismissed on motion practice as a result of Yankwitt LLP attorneys uncovering that our client's name was forged on the sale documents provided to the decedent and then arguing in briefing that our client did not sell the car to the decedent. When the case was over, our client called and thanked us profusely for saving her house, which she would have lost had the case gone the other way.

**Tejash:** Who were some of your legal mentors?

**Russell:** I've been lucky to have had

unbelievable mentors in my life, starting with my father, George Yankwitt, former head of litigation at Bryan Cave. He taught me that the best way to win a trial is to out-work the other side, and to always aggressively and ethically fight on your client's behalf. My brother, Ian Yankwitt, a former federal defender, instilled in me the importance of presenting simple, digestible fact patterns to the jury. Finally, my mentors from Skadden, Arps, Jay Kasner and Johnathan Lerner, who taught me the importance of a perfect work product, to be compelling and careful in everything you write.

**Tejash:** If you were not practicing law, what would you be doing?

**Russell:** Working in politics.

**Tejash:** What might people be surprised to learn about you?

**Russell:** When I graduated from college, I wanted to be a psychologist.

**Tejash:** What do you splurge on?

**Russell:** Family vacations.

**Tejash:** What is the best hour of your day?

**Russell:** 5:00 a.m.

**Tejash:** What are some of your favorite movies?

**Russell:** The *Rocky* movies

**Tejash:** What is the best advice you have ever received?

**Russell:** "I don't hear no bell," from the great poet Rocky Balboa. For me, that means to never give up on our clients, and to always find a solution for them.

**Tejash:** What is your favorite part of being involved with the WCBA?

**Russell:** I love mentoring young lawyers.