

DEAN OF THE TRIAL BAR

Kirk J. Goza

Kirk Goza is a Dean of the Trial Bar, and it is hard to imagine anyone more deserving. For those of us who have watched Kirk try cases and devote himself to trial advocacy for more than four decades, this recognition feels exactly right.

Kirk learned the art of trying cases at Shughart, Thomson & Kilroy, one of Kansas City's storied firms. He trained under some of the city's most formidable trial lawyers — Harry Thomson, Jack Kilroy Sr., Larry Ward, Jim Foland and his longtime friend and mentor, Tom Kokoruda. The firm's legacy in this award is extraordinary. Harry Thomson was among the first Deans of the Trial Bar in 1985. Kilroy, Ward, Jennifer Gille Bacon, Kokoruda, Foland and Bob Henderson all followed. That is the tradition in which Kirk was raised. Those lawyers taught him that trial work demands relentless preparation, intellectual honesty and unwavering commitment to the client's cause. Kirk absorbed every lesson and made them his own.

He later brought that same standard to Shook, Hardy & Bacon, another pillar of Kansas City trial practice. At both firms, Kirk earned a reputation as a skilled advocate and leader. In 2005, we founded Goza & Honnold LLC. Twenty-one years later, he remains an indefatigable advocate for injured individuals and families.

What sets Kirk apart is the intensity of his preparation. He is a master of the meticulously crafted trial notebook. Every word of an opening statement is practiced, refined and practiced again before colleagues and staff. Every trial box is packed with care — medical records, exhibits, supplies and the ever-present Pep-O-Mint Life Savers. Kirk prepares not merely to be ready, but to be dominant.

That dominance shows most clearly in his cross-examinations. Kirk adopted demonstrative exhibits and trial animations long before they became routine. He learns the medicine and science of each case to a degree that often surpasses opposing experts.



Kirk and his sons mountain climbing in Chile.

I have watched, time and again, as Kirk methodically cornered an adverse expert with carefully constructed questions — each building on concessions secured in deposition — until the witness had nowhere to go. Those moments were never luck; they were the product of meticulous work.

Kirk brings a physical vitality to the courtroom that matches his intellectual rigor. Dedicated to fitness throughout his life, he moves through a trial with purposeful energy — quick and deliberate, never hurried. His preparation frees him to be spontaneous when opportunity arises. Only a lawyer who has done the exhaustive work earns the right to improvise.

Through it all, Kirk has been unfailingly fair and cordial to opposing counsel — intensely competitive on the merits, yet never sharp-elbowed. He understands that courtesy and ferocity are not mutually exclusive. His range is equally remarkable: medical malpractice, products liability, employment, railroad and toxic tort. Early in his career, he could humanize the gruffest surgeon or the most impersonal corporate defendant. Today, he continues to advance significant national litigation, including the JUUL youth addiction cases and ongoing social media youth addiction litigation.

Kirk's professional honors tell part of the story. Early in his career, Missouri judges selected him for the prestigious Lon O. Hocker Award as one of the state's outstanding young trial lawyers. He is a Fellow of the American College of Trial Lawyers and of both the International Society of Barristers and the International Academy of Trial Lawyers. He is a past chapter president of the American Board of Trial Advocates and has been named to Best Lawyers in America for more than 20 years. Yet honors are only part of the story.

What matters more is what Kirk has given back. The lawyers at Shughart, Thomson & Kilroy invested in him, and he has repaid that debt many times over. I know this firsthand. Kirk has been my mentor, colleague and friend since my first days as a summer law clerk, and much of what I know about preparing and trying a case I trace to him. Kirk's wife, Shirley — a legal titan in her own right and a past KCMBA Baron of the Boardroom — has been his partner throughout. Together they have raised three remarkable children, J. Kirk, Blake and Kiersten, and are now blessed with seven grandchildren.

Those who know Kirk have their own stories and reasons for the deep respect they hold for him. I will simply say this: adding Kirk Goza's name to the roster of Deans of the Trial Bar feels natural and right. And the greatest thing is that he is still at it — as busy, as strong and as committed to the ideals of trial lawyer excellence as he has ever been.

About the Author



Bradley D. Honnold is a founding partner of Goza & Honnold, LLC, a plaintiffs' personal injury firm in Overland Park, Kansas. He has been Kirk Goza's law partner for 21 years and his friend for even longer.

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