

MVP: Dechert's Mark Cheffo

Law360 (December 10, 2019, 12:17 PM EST) -- Mark Cheffo, Dechert LLP's product liability and mass torts co-chair, guided Purdue in its move to settle thousands of claims in nationwide opioid litigation brought over the drugmaker's Oxycontin painkiller, earning him a spot among Law360's 2019 Product Liability MVPs.

HIS BIGGEST ACCOMPLISHMENT THIS YEAR:

Cheffo, who was also recognized as a product liability MVP in 2017, told Law360 his biggest accomplishment this time around was also his most challenging: serving as Purdue's lead national and trial counsel in the multidistrict litigation brought against it over OxyContin's role in the opioid epidemic. The job required Cheffo to coordinate thousands of suits against the drugmaker in litigation that includes an Ohio-based national opioid MDL and another involving numerous New York municipalities.

Purdue filed for Chapter 11 in September and inked deals in some 2,000 opioid suits. The Sackler family also pledged \$3 billion to the settlement fund.

Although the case was "extremely challenging" — in part because of the volume of litigation involving state, federal and tribal entities — Cheffo said that Purdue's Chapter 11 filing is a good outcome.

"A crushing amount of litigation had to be managed, but it was a successful result," Cheffo said. "The ultimate outcome is to hopefully create a company that comes out of bankruptcy that will, amongst other things, serve the public good."



Cheffo said he wouldn't have been able to handle the Purdue litigation without his team at Dechert. With their help, he remained active as the lead counsel in several other MDLs this year, representing clients including Atrium against claims about hernia mesh. He also defended Saint-Gobain against pollution claims stemming from Teflon production and Pfizer against claims relating to its heart drug Lipitor.

"I've been able to really immerse myself in these litigations at the same time," Cheffo said. "This is really a tribute to the many great lawyers at our firm."

WHY HE'S A PRODUCT LIABILITY ATTORNEY:

Cheffo said he began his career as a general litigator before moving to the product liability space. He was drawn to the practice in part because it allows him to play detective.

"There's an element of being inquisitive — really a detective quality," Cheffo said. "It's digging deep and it often involves science and technology and having to master those [topics] even though you may not be the subject matter expert going in."

The work also requires seeing how a product impacts peoples' lives.

"It's about real people and real issues and trying to really understand kind of what caused a particular injury," he added. "Every day when I get up, I enjoy what I do."

WHAT MOTIVATES HIM:

Recalling his experience on sites like nuclear power plants and manufacturing and automotive facilities, Cheffo said the practice always brings new learning opportunities.

"It's the luxury of being able to understand the intricacies and nuances of products, how they work and the science behind them," Cheffo said. "You cannot succeed in this practice area if you are not a life learner."

HIS ADVICE FOR JUNIOR ATTORNEYS:

Cheffo said the importance of being a constant learner also applies to new hires and junior attorneys.

"Ask questions, be inquisitive and don't necessarily assume that the way it's been done before is the way it has to be done," he said.

It's also key for attorneys to view their career as "a long-term continuum," Cheffo said.

"That involves developing relationships both within your group, within your other firms and even across the aisle on the plaintiff side," he said. "Probably the most important thing that you have as a lawyer is your reputation, and you should carefully guard and manage that in a way that that you'll be proud of."

— *As told to Matthew Thomas*

Law360's MVPs are attorneys who have distinguished themselves from their peers over the past year through high-stakes litigation, record-breaking deals and complex global matters. A team of Law360 editors selected the 2019 MVP winners after reviewing nearly 900 submissions.

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