

Kansas City Business Journal - September 14, 2009
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KANSAS CITY BUSINESS JOURNAL

Friday, September 11, 2009

Lathrop & Gage practice wins big in insurance recovery

Kansas City Business Journal - by [Steve Vockrodt](#) Staff Writer

Lathrop & Gage LLP partner William Beck has found an elusive moneymaking practice in today's bum economy.

Beck and other Lathrop lawyers have built up one of the nation's bigger practices in insurance recovery this year.

The firm's 34 insurance recovery lawyers would have put it among the top 10 such U.S. practices by number of lawyers, according to a 2008 survey by industry publication *Business Insurance*.

Beck himself has recovered \$33 million so far this year in insurance settlements, adding to his total of \$150 million in the past 10 years. He said he didn't know the firm's total recovery.

A large measure of the practice stemmed from representing **BFI Waste Services**, which got several contaminated sites in recent years through acquisitions, necessitating insurance settlements and litigation.

This year, however, Beck brokered big settlements on behalf of wrongly convicted defendants, including \$3.4 million for the estate of Kenneth Waters, imprisoned more than 18 years for armed robbery and murder and later freed by exonerating DNA evidence. Beck argued that prosecutors did not turn over evidence that could have acquitted Waters.

That case, in which Waters' sister earned a law degree to appeal his conviction, is being made into a movie with Hilary Swank cast as Waters' sister but apparently nobody cast as Beck.

The case was also one of several past and current insurance cases that Beck worked with well-known defense lawyer Barry Scheck, who founded the Innocence Project and helped acquit O.J. Simpson in his murder trial in 1995.

Beck said this economy has made insurance companies less willing to part with their money in settlements.

Ben Schmitt, an insurance defense lawyer with **Schmitt Manz Swanson & Mulhern PC** in Kansas City, said some insurance companies have been willing to settle cases sooner, before potential costs get more expensive.

"We definitely are trying to evaluate the cases as early as possible," he said.

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William Beck

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