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Novack and Macey's Monte Mann: He's there when things go wrong

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Monte Mann with his wife Laurie and daughters Alex and Eliza during a spring break trip last March to the Valley of Fire State Park in Nevada. Mann and his family drove from Las Vegas to Fire State Park, Zion National Park, the Grand Canyon and then back to Vegas.

Monte Mann knows how to fix real estate problems. That's good; Mann is co-chairman of the real estate litigation group at Chicago law firm Novack and Macey. This means that he represents clients – often real estate developers and brokers – engaged in some of the highest of high-stakes litigation.

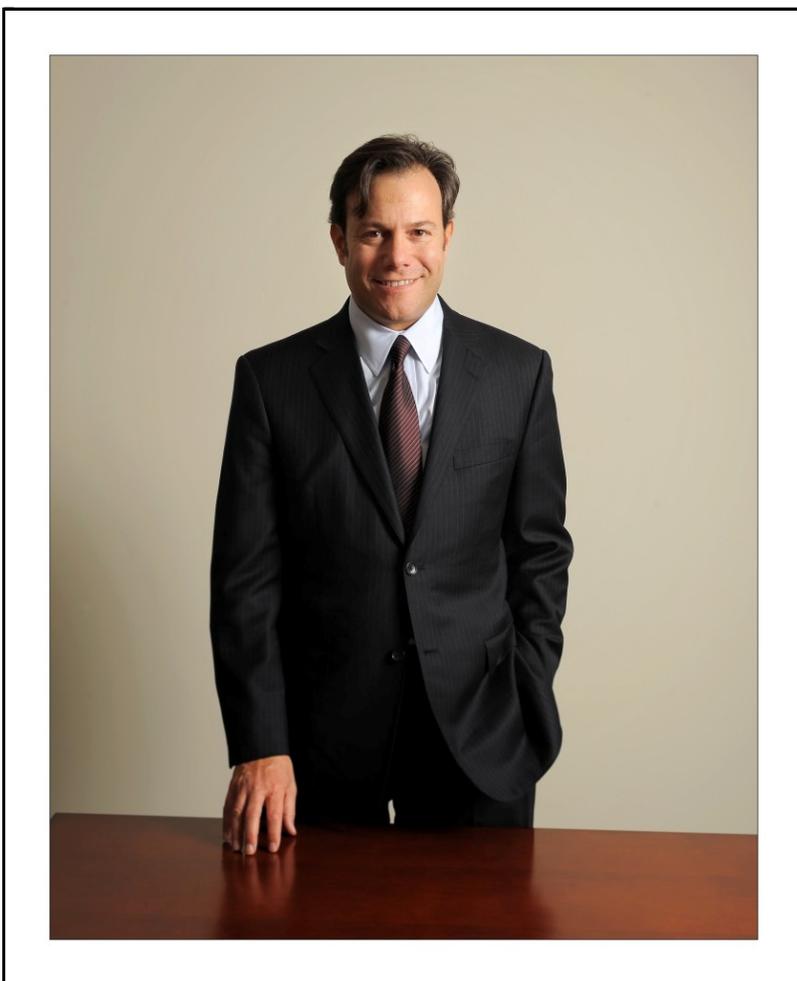
During his career, Mann has notched several victories for these commercial real estate clients. This includes defending a global real estate services firm against a \$300 million claim that it provided bad advice when it recommended that a bank purchase a real estate portfolio. It also includes representing one of the country's largest shopping mall REITs in a high-tech multi-million-dollar contract dispute over private-line telecommunications.

Mann recently spoke to Midwest Real Estate News about his career and why he finds the world of commercial real estate such a fascinating one.

When a career finds you: I wouldn't say that I chose to specialize in real estate litigation. It just sort of happened. Chicago is such a great town for real estate. The real estate community here is so strong. One case led to another. Pretty soon, I realized that a huge percentage of my practice was representing commercial real estate industry professionals in lawsuits. This wasn't a specialty I sought out. Word of mouth helped, too. One client leads to another. Pretty soon you look up and, wow, look what I've done.

You meet the most interesting people: The people in this industry are so interesting. The developers themselves I find to be so exciting. They have great imaginations. They envision things and then they create them. They bring their visions from a concept to something that you can look at, touch and feel. That is pretty cool. Those people are fascinating to me. Then there are the other brokers and service providers. They are also pretty creative people. I don't know if sexy is the right word for real estate, but it does have a flair to it. And to work on real estate matters in Chicago? That's a nice bonus, too. Chicago is a great real estate town.

Big cases: I worked on a very cool case defending a big real estate service provider here in Chicago that was sued by a bank. The bank claimed that the service provider gave it negligent or bad advice with respect to a sale/leaseback portfolio that it suggested the bank pursue. After the bank pursued the strategy that the service provider recommended, the bank got new leadership. The new leadership disagreed with the strategy, and the bank filed a lawsuit. We defended that lawsuit and got a great result for them. I made some great relationships during that case. That was an extremely rewarding case.



Monte Mann in his office

I've represented a bunch of REITs, too, in cases concerning their telecom or Internet systems and whether the companies that provided the services had breached their agreements with the REITs. These were multi-million-dollar private line systems. Those were interesting cases, too.

I do represent a lot of people in real estate partnerships, too, when those partnerships go wrong. There might be a lot of people involved in these partnerships, so there are a lot of opportunities for something to go wrong.

Finding solutions: I am a problem solver, and that helps in this business. I like to work things out. I like to find ways out of sticky situations. We are called upon when there is no solution that people can find. They feel that they are going to have to go to the courts to get something resolved or that they have to threaten to go to the courts to get a resolution. People have confidence that I can come in and get something done.

There are always challenges: It's not always easy juggling cases. Managing cases is hard. At the same time, I have to satisfy not only my clients but also the judges. So I serve different audiences. That can be difficult, too. Then there's the fact that the outcomes in this business are not guaranteed, no matter how hard or smart you work. Judges and the law are not as predictable as clients would like. It is difficult to manage the expectations that clients have. They sometimes don't understand that this is inherently an unpredictable business.

The trends: Today I am seeing a lot of partnership disputes. There has been more real estate activity in the past few years. With more activity and more transactions there come more disputes. There was a period of time when everyone hit the brakes. There were not a lot of disputes because people weren't doing deals. Now people are doing more deals, and this means that you are seeing more partnership disputes.

Off the clock: What do I like to do when I'm not at work? I like to be 100 percent with my kids and family. I like helping my kids with their homework, hanging out with them. Of course, now that they have gotten a little older, they don't want to be with dad as much.

When I do have some free time and I'm not with my family, I do like to golf. I'm a bad golfer, but I am trying to get better, as cliché as it might sound for a lawyer to play golf in his free time. I also like to hang out with my wife, of course. My wife loves to walk. When I want to humor her, I go on a long walk with her.

I have a big extended family here in Chicago, two sisters and a brother. They all have kids, so I have a lot of nieces and nephews. Both of my parents live in Chicago, too, so I end up spending a lot of time with my extended family.

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