

ANGELA JACKSON

Employers Rely Upon Trial Lawyer's Judgment and Practicality

by Elizabeth Davies

ANN ARBOR—Angela L. Jackson's job is part advocate, part adviser and part listener.

As a shareholder with Hooper Hathaway, P.C., those are roles she fills quite well.

"I admire Angela's reasonable judgment and practicality," says Peter Katz, who previously worked for one of Jackson's clients. "Like most good attorneys, Angela's advice is always sound.

"But it is her willingness to partner on the analysis and provide her recommendations which make her admirable. In my opinion, this is the best way for outside counsel to assist their in-house counsel clients."

Indeed, Jackson's expertise runs the gamut of employment and business litigation, from contract disputes to corporate advising. Though her practice mostly encompasses companies in southeast Michigan, she has represented many household names as well.

"I have always been drawn to business and employment law," Jackson says. "I love learning about what my clients do."

Having a key understanding of her clients' needs is how Jackson is best able to live out her legal philosophy: balancing risk mitigation through the lens of specific business needs. That's how she helps clients make decisions, including whether to pursue litigation and how to end employee relationships.

"We need to evaluate whether the employee is critical and whether improvements can be made to salvage the relationship or not," she says.

Employment issues, including agreements and separations, are among the main topics Jackson tackles for client Publishers Storage and Shipping, LLC.

"Many of these issues can be difficult and complex, and invariably you are faced with balancing clear company policies with emotions and real-life hardships," says owner and president Michael Seagram.

Seagram particularly appreciates the way Jackson works toward resolution in tough scenarios.

"Angela always includes fair consideration of the other party's position," he says. "I've seen attorneys practice a more aggressive,



one-sided approach, and it rarely results in a good outcome."

EXCELLING IN EMPLOYMENT LAW

Whether it's the grocery store where her family shops or the gym where she goes to exercise, Jackson's community is filled with clients whose businesses benefit from her work.

"I find everyday work fascinating," she says. "From technology to manufacturing to retail, it's interesting to see how the world works."

Sometimes, it's up to her to guide clients through the way the legal system works. That can mean not pursuing a case that has merit.

"The economics of litigation can be challenging," Jackson says. "It's very difficult to control, and I often give the advice that I don't think litigation is a good path because of the economics.

"That's often hard for clients to understand when they have a dispute. Often, people want

to litigate over the principle or fairness of an issue, but it is sometimes hard to have that make financial sense."

While helping a client make that decision, Jackson listens to their dispute, analyzes their positions, and talks through the practical and financial implications that litigation would bring.

Jackson is happy her partners agree that litigation isn't an automatic go-to solution.

"My partners are also sensitive to making sure we are advocating the best solution for the client, even though it may not be the approach they expected," she says. "It might not be economically beneficial for me and my law firm, but it is often the better advice. We strive to give the advice that results in the best result for our clients, and that must take into account the overall economics of the dispute and the time it takes to litigate."

While being represented by Jackson in

a business dispute with former business partners, client Phil Curtis was impressed with her approach.

“Angela is an extremely bright woman, an excellent litigator who is always very well prepared, and she pays attention to every detail,” he says. “Angela has a great work ethic and is an extremely ethical lawyer who takes her job and her profession very seriously.”

Jackson’s courtroom record speaks for itself.

“She is one of the few lawyers in the state with two eight-figure judgments to her name,” points out a former law partner. “She is in a very exclusive category. She is a very diligent and extremely effective lawyer.”

He attributes her success in part to her logical, efficient approach and to the way she connects with juries. The partner recalls a lengthy trial he worked on alongside Jackson. In it, Jackson gave the closing argument, and he gave the rebuttal closing argument. After the jury gave them a large award, they asked several jurors why they dispersed that large sum of money in the way they did.

“Because that’s what Angela asked us to do,” he remembers them saying. “She had a lot of credibility with the jurors.”

TAKING ON UNIQUE CASES

Executive Robert Richardson hired Jackson to represent him after being accused of trade secret theft and breaching his fiduciary duties.

“Angela never blinked an eye to represent me after reviewing the facts of my case,” he says. “Her diligence in the case over a two-year span allowed us to win a settlement in my favor.”

He appreciated the way Jackson explained the complexities of the case and remained accessible during a difficult time.

“She is empathetic to her clients’ concerns, as well as to key family members,” he says. “Angela is well-prepared and professional in her approach, but she is very serious and intense when the circumstances call for an applicable tone.”

Not all of Jackson’s clients come to her for her employment expertise. Jackson’s trial experience, though extensive, often doesn’t overlap with her employment practice—simply because of the nature of that field.

“We see fewer and fewer lawsuits (in employment law),” she says. “When we do, it’s usually discrimination, sexual harassment or non-compete cases. A case that we actually take to trial is a really big deal.”

In an effort to keep her clients from enduring such suits, much of her day-to-day practice involves drafting policies and agreements as well as offering advice designed to prevent litigation.

Still, over the course of her 25-year career, Jackson has had several moments to shine in the courtroom.

One of her more memorable cases resulted in an \$11.9 million verdict in a legal malpractice claim that she tried with her then partner Anthony Patti. That case, before Wayne County Circuit Court, involved a physician who had been fired and blackballed following a whistleblower complaint. The lawyer who initially represented him in that whistleblower suit lost the original case on summary disposition and missed a critical deadline in the appeal.

“It was very preventable,” Jackson recalls.

“The lawyer who represented him was disbarred during the case.”

Just last year, Jackson represented a client in a civil racketeering case in federal court. Her client, an airline, had been swindled by a man who claimed to operate a private, offshore bank to finance the purchase of jet fuel. Her client funded an escrow account to pay for the fuel purchased. However, the defendants were using the money in the escrow account for personal expenses and to gamble on risky investments. Over the course of time, millions of dollars



Fly fishing for salmon on Michigan’s White River near where Jackson grew up



From left: husband Rick Juckniess, son Jackson Juckniess and Jackson hiking in Washington’s Olympic National Park

went missing from that escrow account.

She led the trial, assisted by her colleague Adam Linkner. The jury found in her client's favor, and it resulted in a judgment of more than \$15 million.

An early case stemmed from a personal injury lawsuit in which she and her partner Mark Daane represented the plaintiff. In that instance, their client suffered a brain injury while on a cruise. An intoxicated passenger dropped a coconut, which had been filled with a drink from the bar, from an upper level of the ship. It landed on the client's head.

The case had a litany of unique issues, as it was tried under admiralty law and brought into question the cruise ship's liability in creating an unsafe environment. Under her client's ticket restrictions—the fine print associated with her ticket purchase—the client had waived her right to a jury trial when she bought the cruise ticket. However, Jackson argued that the fine print was unconscionable and a violation of her client's constitutional rights. She won the motion, which allowed a jury to hear the case.

Before a federal jury in the Southern District of New York, the trial team argued that the cruise ship created an unsafe environment by serving such large and heavy drinks to intoxicated people on upper levels on rough waters. The jury found against the cruise line and awarded their client \$800,000.

STARTING OUT

Early in her career, before such wins gave her a reputation to be reckoned with, Jackson sometimes found herself underestimated.

Standing 5 feet tall and among a minority of women in the field, Jackson has plenty of stories about being mistaken for a court reporter or secretary. That's why she made a point to wear suits as a young lawyer, even though



Another steelhead catch



Fly fishing for steelhead in Western Michigan

she worked at a law firm with casual dress attire.

"One of my law partners asked why I dressed up every day," she recalls. "I laughed and said I have a hard enough time being taken seriously given the way I look."

Rather than be intimidated under those circumstances, Jackson chose to outperform and leave her adversaries in awe. She spent her

her school's debate team, and she won many awards. She was influenced by her coach and English teacher Beverly Koppenhofer. So, she headed to the University of Michigan to study English and then went on to graduate from the University of Michigan Law School.

Jackson took a job with Hooper Hathaway after law school in 1995 and has remained with the firm ever since. Today, the 51-year-old is an owner of the firm and the only female owner in the firm's history, and she chairs the firm's employment group.

"I work with an amazingly smart and talented group of people here," she says.

Jackson currently serves on the Institute of Continuing Legal Education Labor & Employment

Law Advisory Board and on the State Bar of Michigan Committee on Character and Fitness. She has been a speaker and contributor within the legal industry on a range of business and employment topics.

Her husband, Rick Juckniess, also is a business lawyer who operates his own practice. The pair have a 13-year-old son, Jackson. The family enjoys hiking, backpacking and fly-fishing in the great outdoors.

The time away lets Jackson return to her career with renewed energy so she can continue to use her years of experience to help southeast Michigan companies continue to thrive.

"Angela definitely has that 'gets it' attribute," says client Seagram. "Angela easily processes the essential factors and is able to quickly zero in on a clear path toward resolution. This consistent ability to successfully grasp the matters at hand has led me to confidently trust her counsel." ■

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first few years taking on a lot of plaintiff's work and getting comfortable in the courtroom.

"I liked that because I got a lot of trial and deposition experience early in my career," she says. "I remember taking the deposition of a brain surgeon who was acting as an expert witness when I was three years out of law school."

Over the course of her career, female lawyers became more commonplace, and that's a change Jackson believes is a big benefit to the industry.

"Everybody comes with a perspective," she says. "The more diverse your population is, the more likely you'll find a benefit from those different perspectives."

Becoming a lawyer wasn't a surprise career choice for Jackson. She was angling toward law school ever since middle school. In her young teen years, Jackson loved being a part of