

LAWYERS OF THE YEAR

Bennett's big year

James Bennett and partner started their new firm on a positive track



Photo by Karen Elshout

James Bennett's work netted his clients a multimillion dollar verdict and a big defense win in the last 12 months.

Jim Bennett was an integral part of two of the biggest jury trials in St. Louis over a 12-month span ending in November.

In the first case, Bennett co-represented Structural Polymer Systems, Ltd., a British building material manufacturer. After a five-week jury trial in U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Missouri, his client won a \$36 million verdict in its breach of contract case against Zoltek Corp., a St. Louis-based carbon fiber manufacturer.

On the heels of that victory, Bennett jumped into the Metro litigation – which ultimately became the longest jury trial in St. Louis County Circuit Court history. Metro, the transit agency operating St. Louis' light rail system, sought to hold the partners who designed the latest extension, known as the Cross County Collaborative, liable for \$81 million in cost overruns and billing issues.

Bennett represented STV Engineering, a member of the collaborative. After 15 weeks of trial and four days of jury deliberations, the jury returned favorable verdicts for STV on all nine counts.

Bennett's trial work in the Metro case was acclaimed by co-counsel and courtroom observers, according to St. Louis attorney Gerard "Jerry" Carmody. Notably, Bennett elicited several admissions from Metro CEO Larry Salci during cross-examination, Carmody said.

"He got to the bottom line right away that Salci had not even read the contracts when he directed Metro to file suit," he said. "He also got Salci, when pressed on whether he thought it was important to at least know what the contracts say before

launching this huge suit, to admit that he doesn't care what anyone else thinks."

Bennett credited a "very good working relationship" among the lawyers for all five defendants in the Metro trial. "It was very much a team effort," he said.

Bennett and his partner, veteran St. Louis lawyer Edward L. Dowd Jr., launched their firm in 2006. He said they spend a lot of time trying to communicate their trial themes "in ways that will have meaning for people's everyday life. Hopefully, through the results, we've been able to do that in our cases."

Dowd called Bennett the "hardest worker" he has ever seen.

"He is totally prepared, has a tremendous ability to focus on the themes he wants to get across to the jury and has a tremendous ability to connect with the jurors," Dowd said.

Between the two trials, Bennett also won a high-profile appeal in a case involving Wal-Mart's policies for filling vacant positions. And he obtained a \$1.1 million award in a motion for sanctions related to claims of witness tampering in a 2006 trial conducted by different counsel.

"It was a great year not only for the great results that he achieved, but Ed and Jim together did all this trial work in these major cases while having just started this new firm together," Carmody said.

— Anne Vitale

JAMES F. BENNETT, 37

Work Experience: Partner at Dowd Bennett since 2006; partner at Bryan Cave from 2002 to 2006; associate there from 2000 to 2001 and 1996 to 1998; judicial clerkship for Anthony M. Kennedy, associate justice of the U.S. Supreme Court, from 1999 to 2000; judicial clerkship for J.L. Edmondson, chief judge of the 11th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals, Atlanta, 1995 to 1996
Education: Juris Doctor, Vanderbilt, 1995; Westminster College, 1992