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Support for the masses

Lawyer likes to represent people, not corporations

By Shawn Regan

NEWS STAFF WRITER

SOUTHBOROUGH - Renowned for his work on high-profile civil cases and for winning some of the state's largest monetary awards, attorney Edward C. Bassett Jr. said the greatest privilege of a lawyer is to help people who truly need help.

Whether representing Drs. Sunil and Deborah Eappen in the case against nanny Louise Woodward, Wendy Bloniasz against the drunk driver who nearly killed her, or five Worcester women who plunged to their near-deaths after a cable on a vertical cable car snapped in Quebec City, Bassett said he loves fighting for and winning compensation for real people who have been injured.

"I enjoy working for real people, not corporations," said the Southborough resident, who lives on Sears Road with his wife, Nancy, and their three children, Christopher, 7, Allison, 12, and Andrew, 14. "Representing

plaintiffs on a contingency basis allows them to get the best attorneys. And I end up working for clients who really need my help and who are generally very supportive and appreciative."

Bassett, who bought the first home on Sears Road 18 years ago, was recently named one of the top 10 attorneys in the state by Massachusetts Lawyers Weekly. He is the only attorney in central Massachusetts on this year's list.

Bassett has also given back to the town as a member and past chairman of Southborough's Zoning Board of Appeals, having served from 1985 to 1998.

The "top 10" lawyers were chosen from 37,000 practicing attorneys in



Edward Bassett

Massachusetts based on "winning important decisions and being involved in cases that raise challenging legal issues."

Bassett was co-legal counsel for the Eappens in the couple's wrongful death lawsuit against British nanny Woodward for the death of their son, baby Matthew Eappen.

"We won an agreement that (Louise) can never profit from her story; that's what the Eappens wanted," Bassett said. "The judgment is enforceable in all countries and if she ever makes money off her story, all the profits have to go to UNICEF," a non-profit charity.

Bassett also represented Wendy Bloniasz, "a beautiful, 21-year-old Worcester woman whose car was hit by a man on a drunken rampage in a stolen car," Bassett said.

Bloniasz suffered a skull fracture and brain damage when her car was

struck by John Phelan as she pulled out of a parking lot on Rte. 9 in Shrewsbury on May 29, 1993. Phelan was sentenced to 10 years in prison. He was released from prison in 1999.

Bassett won \$22.6 million for Bloniasz, believed to be Worcester County's largest personal injury judgment ever. At the time of the accident, Bloniasz worked at a Westborough clothing store and attended Becker College in Worcester.

Bassett said he has recovered some of the award in confidential settlements with a number of bars that served Phelan alcohol the night of the accident.

"And rest assured, if he ever hits the lottery, we'll be right there," he said.

Bassett is currently representing about 50 Worcester women in a class-action lawsuit against Dow Corning. The women received Dow Corning breast implants that either ruptured or caused disease, he said.

"The main problem is that all the literature the women were shown prior to getting their implants said the implants would last forever," he said. "Now we find that 70 percent of implants over 10 years old fail."

Bassett said a judge recently approved a \$4 billion nationwide settlement with Dow, but a few aspects of the deal still need to be worked out. A resolution is expected this year, he said.

A partner at Worcester's Mirick O'Connell law firm, Bassett heads the firm's personal injury group.

Asked to recollect his most memorable ZBA case, Bassett recalled a late 1980s affordable housing proposal across from the Mary Finn School.

"It was a very controversial project and I remember what seemed like endless, long, hot summer meetings,"

Bassett said. "The project had a life of its own. It kept going and going and the neighbors became more and more determined to block it."

The ZBA finally approved a comprehensive permit for the development, allowing many more housing units that are allowed under the town's zoning laws. But the developers kept missing deadlines and eventually the board sided with the neighbors and rejected the project, Bassett said.

"They sued us, but eventually gave up," he said. "And the town ended up with a much smaller development."

Bassett said he would consider one day returning to town service.

"I loved it," he said of his time on the ZBA. "I could see myself returning once my kids finish college and I have more time." ■