

DAILY REPORT

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PROFESSIONAL 2017 EXCELLENCE

DISTINGUISHED LEADERS

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MATT MOFFETT HAS SECURED significant defense verdicts in numerous high risk and exposure cases, but what drew attention in 2016 was his work as president of the Georgia Defense Lawyers Association (GDLA).

MATT MOFFETT:

Gray, Rust, St. Amand, Moffett & Brieske

His goal upon taking the helm was to expand the visibility of the GDLA, especially to dispel the perception that it was just the insurance defense bar—or that it was the criminal defense bar. His goal for the GDLA was “to reach anyone defending businesses or individuals in civil cases.”

Another of Moffett’s goals was to open lines of communication with its adversaries in the Georgia Trial Lawyers Association (GTLA). Moffett, the son of a plaintiff’s lawyer, said “both groups fight for justice.”

That effort led to the GDLA and GTLA teaming up with the American College of Trial Lawyers (ACTL) Atlanta Chapter to hold the first-ever

networking event on the first night of college football at Stats Sports Bar. The appellate bench was also invited to join the rivals for fun. The GDLA and GTLA also presented a forum for candidates for three Fulton County Superior Court, and Moffett and GTLA president Darren Penn moderated together.

He graduated from Emory University School of Law.

As president of the Georgia Defense Lawyers Association, you made efforts to open communication between your group and the plaintiffs bar. Where did you find that lawyers for defendants and plaintiffs have common ground?

I know good lawyers on both sides of the aisle. What they have in common is a burning desire to win for their clients without compromising the integrity of the profession. Those good lawyers across the aisle only make me a better lawyer, too.

You've been a leader in the GDLA's Trial and Mediation Academy, including adding the word "mediation" to it. How hard is it to decide whether to advise your client to go to trial or mediate a dispute?

I have a framed charcoal sketch of Honest Abe hanging in my office. I agree with our great lawyer president that all cases should be resolved, if at all possible, through respectful negotiation and reasonable compromise. Mediation brings people together in good faith to resolve differences on their own terms, and that is where I first try many of my cases. Our younger lawyers should know how to use this important tool in their toolbox.

What is one of your proudest accomplishments in the law, and what challenge did you have to overcome so you could achieve it?

A judge asked me to assume the defense of a death case for a small business whose insurer had denied it coverage. I said I would consider it, then I quickly said, yes, I would undertake the defense after meeting the business owner, whom I found to be an honorable man. We worked out a payment plan over time (a long time that survived the case) that would allow him to continue to operate his business during the litigation. It was a hard-fought three years, but it was a great day for him when the jury saw it our way!