

MONDAY, JANUARY 31, 2011

LITIGATION

Star Turn That Almost Didn't Happen Pays Off

By **Jean-Luc Renault**
Daily Journal Staff Writer

Roman Silberfeld never handled an entertainment case before he took over the lawsuit between production company Celador International and the Walt Disney Co. on the eve of the trial.

"I didn't even know what Celador was," said the 61-year-old managing partner of Robins, Kaplan, Miller & Ciresi LLP's Century City office.

Until then, Silberfeld specialized in medical-device and mass tort litigation.

'In my household, being a lawyer was an honorable thing to do with your life.'

Less than two years later, the case over allegedly unpaid back-end profits from the show "Who Wants to be a Millionaire" ended in a \$319 million verdict for his production company client, one of the largest plaintiff awards last year.

The victory, which Disney has appealed, continues to win Silberfeld accolades in the entertainment and legal industries — and the Beverly Hills Bar Association plans to present him with its inaugural "excellence in advocacy" award at a dinner ceremony on Wednesday.

It's an honor for Silberfeld, who almost didn't try the case in the first place.

Celador, which created the hit game show, filed suit back in 2004. Five years in, the firm representing Celador, Dreier LLP's California affiliate, imploded upon Marc Dreier's arrest on charges of investment

fraud.

Silberfeld inherited the case in 2009 and the trial was pushed to 2010. Over the course of a month, Silberfeld and co-counsel Bernice Conn went to a work convincing a federal jury in Riverside that Disney's television companies improperly cut Celador out of the show's massive profits.

The verdict, Silberfeld said, gave him a crash course in the modern news cycle.

Days after the jury's decision, the person who tracks the firm's media mentions pointed out that 205 news outlets picked up the same wire story about the verdict — within 3 minutes.

"I was stunned," he said.

Raised in West Hollywood, Silberfeld knew from a young age he wanted to become a lawyer. His German immigrant parents saw practicing law as a revered profession.

"In my household, being a lawyer was an honorable thing to do with your life," said Silberfeld, who raised four children with his wife, former "Love Boat" actress Patricia Klous.

He attended the UCLA and Loyola Law School and joined the then-named Ermas Simke & Hecht, where he made partner before leaving for Robins Kaplan in 1995.

Silberfeld built a reputation as a skilled attorney with an easygoing demeanor who remained courteous to opposing counsel in even the most contentious disputes.

"Roman is a tremendous lawyer," said David Miyamoto, a partner with Squire, Sanders & Dempsey who faced Silberfeld in a trade-secrets arbitration in 2005.

"It was a good fight, fought hard," Miyamoto said. "Roman and his team were lawyers at the highest level. I came out of it with an enormous amount of respect for him."

To prepare for the Celador case,



Robert Levins / Daily Journal

Roman M. Silberfeld

Silberfeld and Conn reviewed hundreds of boxes of documents and met with industry experts who explained the hazy world of Hollywood bookkeeping.

The intense preparation paid off. Still, Silberfeld said he's humbled by the praise. That includes the Beverly Hills Bar's award, which will

be presented alongside an award for former California Chief Justice Ronald M. George recognizing the judge's legacy.

"They ought to put me in the foyer and keep him in the main room," Silberfeld said.

jean-luc_renault@dailyjournal.com