

# JORDAN SHIFRIN

## Navigating the Rules of Condo Living

by Colleen Burke

Debbie Karhanek has no doubt that her small business would be in a world of hurt without the help of Jordan Shifrin.

Karhanek has established "Simple Gourmet," which was scheduled to open before the end of 2007. While food is her passion, navigating the law in order to make her business a reality was proving to be a recipe for disaster.

Then she remembered Shifrin, whom she knew when he did work for the condominium association at her home.

"He is so down-to-earth," Karhanek said. "He's generous, he's approachable, and he's very easy for everyone to deal with. Honestly, working with him was a very refreshing experience."

Shifrin, she said, negotiated with her co-op board to help her get the recognition agreement she needed for a small-business loan.

"I can't tell you how grateful I am to him," she said. "He would always call me back, he followed through on his commitments. It's so refreshing to find someone who cares about people, who does what he does for all the right reasons. I remember when he said to me, 'No worries, Debbie. I'll do the work tonight,'" she said. "And he did! I know I can count on him when I need help."

"In my line of business, I know how important customer service is," Karhanek said. "Jordan exemplifies customer service."

High praise from a client, and one who used Shifrin for an area of law that is not his area of focus.

Shifrin is a partner at **Kovitz Shifrin Nesbit PC**, a law firm he founded in the early 1980s that focuses on issues related to condominium and homeowner associations. With locations in Buffalo Grove, Chicago and Naperville, as well as a new office in Racine, Wisconsin, Kovitz Shifrin Nesbit has become a dominant player in the ever-expanding world of association law.

While he has carved a niche for himself in condo law, Shifrin's initial thoughts during his undergraduate days at the University of Illinois-Chicago were focused on journalism.

"I really enjoy writing," he said. "Growing up, I had an excellent education. I had to write a lot and then recite my writing to the class. I find it a good way to express my creativity."

He then toyed with the idea of teaching but turned to law school at the urging of friends. During law school at John Marshall, he clerked for a criminal law firm and even ran a low-cost clinic out of school. But he had become involved in the association of a condo he lived

in, even before he earned his law degree. "Then, I just evolved into this law," he said. "I enjoy it because I really get to touch on every other part of the law—zoning, environmental, labor, insurance and the like."

### "Human Dynamics"

What helps Shifrin excel, it seems, is not just his knowledge of the law but also his ability to read people.

"I look at myself as a problem-solver," he said. "A common problem in condos is simply the human dynamics of getting people to live together in peace. What I think helps me is that

however, don't want their everyday activities—such as walking to the swimming pool in their swimsuits—to be immortalized on tape.

"Jordan is so knowledgeable that I trust him implicitly," said Debbie Citro, one of the staff of five for the association. "He advises me through situations so as not to place our association in any type of legal jeopardy."

Citro credits Shifrin for helping the condo association remain self-managed since its conversion in 1979 and believes "that it is because of him that we don't need a management company." She stated that "we are unique in that we are one of the few



I have a good instinct for reading people. What I feel is important is that I don't look at everyone the same. I size up people and look at where they're coming from. It's all about how you deliver the message."

He also has learned to not take things personally.

"A lot of times people in a litigious situation make things emotional instead of physical," he said, citing an example where an association was in the middle of an uproar regarding how to pay for common-area windows. "The situation got extremely testy, but the antagonists apologized afterward. It was hostile for a while, but I felt good at the end because we were able to work through it."

One situation he's in the process of tackling right now has to do with privacy laws. As counsel for the Brandenberry Park Condo Association in Arlington Heights, he is helping the group with a tenuous scenario: one of its residents wants to install security cameras in a limited common area to view the parking lot and discourage auto break-ins. Other residents,

self-managed associations and we rely on Jordan often."

"One of his strongest qualities is the ability to understand the issues and help his client reach a satisfactory resolution of an issue without it going to litigation," said Brian Meltzer, an attorney with Meltzer, Purtil & Steele, who works on behalf of developers and converters. "Some of his competitors often try to churn a file to instigate and prolong litigation in order to run up the fees. Jordan doesn't do that. He is always looking out for what is best for his client in the long run and I respect him for that."

### Open to Change

As a leader in his law firm, mentoring is a large part of the role Shifrin plays. His mentoring takes place both in-house and through law schools. "Lawyers move like dinosaurs," he said. "We need for young lawyers to understand how things change. We need to be open and adaptable to how things change, and we need (Continued on page 89)

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to be able to see how changes affect the practice of law.”

Shifrin’s life is marked not only by the law; he has many outside interests that tap into his creative side.

Writing continues to be among his top interests. He has authored several books about condo living; he has been published in the Illinois Bar Journal and Condo Lifestyles; and he has written a series of articles for the Daily Herald.

Another passion: the movies. He has produced an independent film called “Moonies,” based on an idea he conceived. He also enjoys live theater, collecting toy soldiers, golfing, reading and cheering on the Bears, Bulls and Cubs.

Shifrin and his wife of 37 years, Rookie, a retired schoolteacher, have two children. Daughter Shana is a litigator with Jenner &

Block—Shifrin took her to court with him, where at the tender age of five she took notes during trial—and son Simon is a journalist in New York.

All in all, Shifrin says, he has an extraordinarily satisfying life.

“When I come back in the next life, I want to come back as me!” ■