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## Framed focus

### *Law firm caught fire early on its growth*

By **TOM KIRVAN**  
*Legal News*

Photos of Detroit from a bygone era line the law offices of Fabian, Sklar & King in Farmington Hills.

Not just any prized photos of Detroit's yesteryear. These, instead, reflect what "we are all about," according to Michael Fabian, founder and managing partner of the firm located at the corner of Farmington and 12 Mile Road.

The vintage black and white photos feature Detroit firehouses, fire trucks, and firemen. They capture the images of some of Detroit's finest, those who have fought fires of all origins, risking their lives in acts of bravery where the human cost is hard to calculate.

For Fabian, the photos are a daily reminder of his professional mission, of the "personality of the firm" that he started in 1986, some 25 years ago this fall.

"Our identity from the beginning was built around developing a reputation as fire injury, explosion, and property damage specialists," Fabian said. "Over the years, we have developed that expertise by focusing all of our efforts and energies in that direction. We don't pretend to be anything else. These fields are our specialty, and that has been by design right from the start."

Fabian, a 1975 alumnus of Michigan State University who received his law degree from the University of Detroit in 1978, had a blueprint in mind when he opened his law practice. His focus was to build a firm that specialized in protecting the "rights of homeowners, business owners, and other policyholders in disputes against property insurance companies following disasters." He figured that it had all the makings of a David vs. Goliath type tale, pitting an upstart firm against well-heeled insurance companies.

"I suspect there is something in my DNA that gives me the kind of desire to take on challenges of that type," Fabian admitted. "Logically, it didn't make a whole lot of sense to go up against these giant insurance companies, especially when they have incredible legal resources and financial backing at their disposal. But, in a way, that made it even more necessary, even more appealing for us to go in that direction.

We have wanted from the start to give people a voice, a chance to right a wrong through the legal process."

His partners in the firm, Stuart Sklar and Patrick King, bring similar mindsets. Each is a Certified Fire and Explosion Investigator (CFEI) through the National Association of Fire Investigators. Sklar is widely recognized as one of the foremost authorities in the U.S. on conducting fire and explosion investigations. He serves on the Technical Committee on Fire Investigations for the National Fire Protection Association, a panel on which Fabian also has been a member.

Fabian, a frequent lecturer on property insurance issues as they relate to the legal profession, is an editor of the "Michigan Insurance Law and Practice," a handbook published by the Institute for Continuing Legal Education.

A native of Oak Park, Fabian was tested at an early age, losing his mother, Pauline, to breast cancer when he was 9 years old. His father, who owned a TV repair shop in Detroit, was then thrust into the role of single parent, charged with the responsibility of raising Fabian and his three brothers.

"There were very few single parents at that time," Fabian said of his father, Philip, who died in 1997 at the age of 84. "He somehow was able to pull it all together, running a business and a family—by himself."

"He also had four pieces of advice for each of us," Fabian added. "He stressed the importance of obtaining a good education, first and foremost. Secondly, he said it was imperative that we become a professional—a doctor, a lawyer, an accountant—so that we would always have a skill or a talent that would be marketable. Third, he said it was our responsibility in life to help others, especially those who were less fortunate. And finally, he said if we took care of the first three on the 'to-do' list, the rest of life would take care of itself. And he was right."

Of the four brothers, two are attorneys and two are CPAs.

"All we're missing is that doctor in the family," Fabian said with a smile.

His wife, Rose, has the health care profession somewhat covered, however. A retired registered nurse, she spent part of her career in the psychiatric care field. The couple has three daughters, Deborah, a Spanish teacher in Linden, whose husband, Ken, is a physical therapist; Missy, a West Bloomfield High alum who is pursuing a teaching degree in special education at Eastern Michigan University; and Lauren, also a West Bloomfield High alum who is working on a degree in criminal justice.

"We also are blessed with two grandchildren," Fabian said of Grace, 4, and Nate, 2. "They are special kids."

Their futures, he admitted, serve as daily inspiration



*Photo by Robert Chase*  
**Now in his 25th year with the law firm that he founded, Michael Fabian has been recognized as a "Super Lawyer" each year since 2006.**

for him to continue to fight "the good legal fight" on behalf of clients who have suffered losses in fire and explosion cases. It is why he is ever mindful of his father's piece of advice to "help others," to give generously to charitable causes, to "make a difference" when the opportunity arises.

"For several years now, we, as a firm, have donated 500 smoke detector devices to the City of Detroit Fire Department so that they may distribute them to homeowners in need," Fabian said. "It was a way for us to give back to the community, to hopefully prevent a fire tragedy from happening."

"We also make a point of funding scholarships for kids to attend the Great Lakes Burn Camp, where burn victims have an opportunity to enjoy a summer camp experience with other children who have also been injured in fires," Fabian added. "We're trying to help at both ends with our contributions." ■