

DEAN KRONE

Bridging Differences for School Districts and Local Governments

by Mika Doyle

ARLINGTON HEIGHTS—While many attorneys pride themselves in getting record verdicts for their clients, Dean W. Krone of Hodges, Loizzi, Eisenhammer, Rodick & Kohn LLP strives to ensure his clients don't have to go to court in the first place.

Krone helps school districts negotiate with municipalities, particularly when tax increment financing (TIF) districts are involved. His goal is to help school districts avoid the financial burden of going to court. It's a job that requires someone who understands the complex nuances of TIF districts and municipal law, and Krone has decades of experience working with both.

"I consider it a victory every time I'm able to help a school district negotiate an agreement with the city or a village that protects them financially and avoids the expense and the anguish of a lawsuit," says Krone.

"Lawsuits are long, they're expensive, they're often emotionally draining and painful—especially when you're litigating against your neighbors in the same community. I have been happy to help school districts negotiate agreements that protected them. I consider that a victory."

Scott Anderson, president of the board of education for Lincolnwood School District 74 says Krone is the school district's go-to attorney for advice on TIF district issues. According to Anderson, Krone helped LSD-74 achieve a favorable outcome when they had a dispute with the village over the potential sale of the Purple Hotel site, a former Hyatt property. Krone helped the school district negotiate with the village so the dispute didn't enter into litigation.

"Dean was instrumental in getting the cooperation of the village in achieving a resolution of our dispute with the village," says Anderson. "If he hadn't been in the picture, I'm not sure it would have worked out the way it did."

WAY TO LEARN ABOUT THE WORLD

Krone almost wasn't in the picture when it comes to being a go-to attorney. He grew up on the Northwest Side of Chicago in the



Edison Park neighborhood and went to college at the University of Chicago. He played tennis, performed with the university's theatrical group, the University of Chicago Blackfriars, and got his degree in English literature.

When he graduated, he knew he wanted to help people, but he wasn't quite sure how, so he got a job at a group home for children. After about a year, he started as a mental health aid with children in the Head Start program while working toward obtaining his teaching certification. Once he was certified as a high school math and English teacher, he got a job teaching math at Niles West High School. At that time in his life, becoming a lawyer wasn't even on Krone's radar.

Although he thoroughly enjoyed teaching and working with kids, about five years into his teaching career he started to think about getting a bigger perspective. He'd always been interested in government and politics, so he gradually settled on the idea of going to law school.

"I did not grow up thinking I wanted to be a lawyer," says Krone. "I thought of law school as a way to learn more about the world, sort of an extension of my liberal arts education, not necessarily as preparation for a career. I was hoping to learn how the world worked, how it operated, how people knew what to do and

not to do. How nations made laws and laid out the framework for society to function."

So, Krone made the transition from teaching to law and attended Chicago-Kent College of Law for one year before finishing his degree at the University of Chicago.

USING LAW TO HELP COMMUNITIES

Krone became an associate at Schiff, Hardin & Waite (now Schiff Hardin) in Chicago soon after law school. One of the cases he worked on during that time gave him his first taste of working for a municipality.

One of the firm's senior partners was the attorney for the village of Winnetka, and the village became involved in a lawsuit over a zoning issue with a developer who wanted to build an apartment complex. The issue, Krone says, involved how many units could be on the property.

"I felt some satisfaction working for the village in a way that I didn't for some of the other clients I was working for because it seemed more like a public service," says Krone.

"I was working for all of the people who lived in the village of Winnetka. We were defending the village's zoning ordinance, which had been drafted in order to try to create an attractive and comfortable place for the people who lived in the village, and that appealed to me."

Krone enjoyed his four years at that law firm, but when he had the opportunity to join a smaller firm that primarily represented municipalities, he decided to make the change because he knew he enjoyed helping communities like Winnetka.

Krone joined the team at Ancel Glink so he could represent municipalities full time, becoming the attorney for villages like Bridgeview, Riverside and Stone Park for about a decade.

Stone Park Mayor Ben Mazzulla says his administration wouldn't have been able to transform their community over the years if it wasn't for Krone's help. With Krone's guidance, Mazzulla says Stone Park added new construction, new franchises, eliminated more than 10 liquor licenses at various locations, and lowered crime by around 80 percent over the last 18 years.

"There are a lot of attorneys out there, and we looked at a lot," says Mazzulla. "We talked to others in the community, but they didn't have what Dean had."

COMING FULL CIRCLE

Krone's background working in education and with municipalities came full circle when he had the opportunity to join his current law firm, Hodges, Loizzi, Eisenhammer, Rodick & Kohn in Arlington Heights.

The firm itself represents more than 200 school districts in Illinois in a multitude of areas, such as labor and personnel, union negotiations and bargaining, students and special education, board governance, and more. But Krone practices in areas that involve school districts interacting with municipalities, particularly when a TIF district is being proposed. Krone typically advises school districts on whether a proposed TIF district will financially benefit or harm the district.

That's exactly why the Maercker School District in Westmont consulted with Krone when the village wanted to install a TIF district in the area in 2012. Paul Watkiss was president of the school's board of education during that time, and he says they hired Krone to help them negotiate with the village of Westmont so property taxes didn't get too high. Even though Watkiss is an attorney himself, he doesn't work with TIF districts, so he appreciated the help of Krone's expertise.

"Dean was very knowledgeable; very helpful," says Watkiss. "We were able to establish that (the village wasn't) really following the current statute at that time, and so they cut down the size of the TIF. I thought that was a pretty reasonable settlement given that it would be hard to prevent them from putting in a TIF altogether, so I was very

happy with that."

Krone also worked with several parties in Wheeling, including the Wheeling Elementary School District, the High School District, the Wheeling Park District, and the Wheeling Public Library District, when the village of Wheeling tried to "creatively" extend an existing TIF district.

Bill Harrison, former president of the Wheeling School District board of education and retired attorney, says the village essentially tried to extend the TIF without seeking legislative approval and without negotiating with any of the other affected bodies, resulting in a never-ending TIF.

Harrison says Krone was brought in to try to reach an intergovernmental agreement, a fight that went on for about a year. "That's where Dean kept us all together," says Harrison. "He managed to keep four different boards together and keep the understanding level, which varies greatly because we all have different backgrounds. You're talking about 28 different elected officials and another 10 or 12 senior-level employees together on the same page and understanding what the issues were, and he did a very good job of doing that."

It's no surprise then that an intergovernmental agreement was reached, and Harrison says downtown Wheeling has now seen all kinds of development since then.

Krone attributes his ability to help his clients reach their legal goals to his diverse experiences throughout his career.

"Because I have a long history of working directly with villages and cities as a municipal attorney," says Krone, "and because I have a long history of working with public schools as a teacher, a school board member, a local school council member in Chicago and a lawyer, I have an understanding of what people in both of those worlds are trying to do, what's important to them. And that makes it easier for me to help them reach an agreement that can accommodate both parties."

Krone and his family have been living Park Ridge for the last 25 years. He and his wife, Sharon, have been married for 36 years, and they have three children, David, 30, Lauren, 25, and Daniel, 25.

In addition to such a noteworthy legal career, Krone stayed extremely active within the school community, serving on one of the very first local school councils in Chicago in 1989 and serving on the Park Ridge School Board for eight years.

As for his clients over the last 15 years, many remember how Krone has brought sides together and kept them out of court by helping them negotiate intergovernmental agreements more than 30 times. ■