

A Gift of Gratitude - Lite DePalma Greenberg & Rivas



Raised in South Orange in the early 1970s, Joseph DePalma grew up within walking distance of Seton Hall University. More than just a visible presence, however, the university became a community of caring and compassion for his family. His father died when DePalma was just 16, leaving his mother, Maisie, to raise him and his younger brother and sister on her own. A difficult time. A secretary at the university, his mother, however, also found support, strength, and hope among the people of Seton Hall.

“Seton Hall was always very good to my mom, and helped her through a very difficult time,” says DePalma. “Through the tuition assistance provided to employees’ families, I also was able to earn all my degrees from Seton Hall except grammar school. If not for that, I don’t know if I would have been able to accomplish what I have in life.”

He attended Seton Hall Prep, then Seton Hall University where he earned his bachelor’s degree in accounting. Next, it was Seton Hall Law where he became one of the first two students to enroll in the then newly implemented joint J.D.-M.B.A. program, graduating in 1982. It was perfect match for a person with a strong interest in both business and the law, and for a lawyer who ended up specializing in class actions, securities, anti-trust product liability, and consumer cases.

Today, he is Managing Partner of Lite DePalma Greenberg & Rivas in Newark, a nationally respected attorney, and a noted “Super Lawyer” based on the recognition of his peers and professional achievements. He also is proud to note that he is the father of four children, ages 11 to 22, and happily married to his “beautiful wife” of 27 years, Diane.

He also is quick to point out that he is not the only one to have benefited from a Seton Hall education. More than half of the 15 attorneys at his firm are graduates of Seton Hall Law. Certainly, that in itself is not unusual for a New Jersey law firm. What is impressive, however, he says, is the quality of the lawyers who graduate from Seton Hall Law.

“Seton Hall Law produces high-caliber attorneys,” he says. “Working in class action, we’re up against the best lawyers in the country. Our adversaries are people who have gone to such places as Harvard and Yale, and we’re able to meet them lockstep all the way.”

The other Seton Hall Law graduates at the firm are Senior Partner Allyn Lite, ’78; Members Victor Afanador ’98, Stephanie Kay ’92, and Michael Patunas ’91; and Associates Jay Baitner ’04, Mayling Blanco ’06, Katrina Carroll ’00, and Jennifer Sarnelli ’02.

Recent cases the firm has handled include gaining a \$193 million settlement in a nationwide securities fraud class action against Motorola; obtaining a settlement of \$216 million in another securities fraud case against Tenet Healthcare; and gaining a \$324 million settlement from Goodyear regarding claims of defects in radiant hoses used in home heating systems.

Grateful for their training and the pipeline of talented attorneys the law school provides, DePalma, his partners, and fellow attorneys have maintained an active and supportive relationship with Seton Hall Law. Afanador coached moot court teams for several years, currently is serving on his alumni reunion committee, and is a member of the Seton Hall Law Alumni Council; Kay worked on her alumni reunion committee last year, and many of the firm's other Seton Hall Law graduates assist in various other capacities. This year, the firm also decided to pledge \$25,000 to the Seton Hall Law Rising capital campaign.

“The law school was a solid institution when I went there, and Dean (Patrick) Hobbs has taken that foundation and moved the school to the next level. I also have the sense that we could see the law school reaching even higher,” says DePalma. “My firm and I have benefited from our relationship with the law school, and all relationships should work both ways. Giving back is our part of that relationship.”