

Two Fredrikson & Byron Pro Bono Teams Receive Minnesota Lawyer's 2015 Attorneys of the Year Award

Firm News

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Attorneys from Fredrikson & Byron's Signal Human Trafficking Team and the Larry Stigen Team were selected to receive the *Minnesota Lawyer's* 2015 Attorney of the Year Award. Honorees were selected based on their leadership, involvement in major cases or other newsworthy events, excellence in corporate or transactional services, and public service. The nominations were submitted by judges, bar groups, clients and fellow attorneys. The honorees come from practice groups including criminal law, litigation, public service, intellectual property and in-house legal departments. *Minnesota Lawyer* will host its 16th Annual Attorney of the Year ceremony on February 18 at the Hyatt Regency Minneapolis.

The Signal International Litigation involves a number of lawsuits brought by the Southern Poverty Law Center and a dozen other law firm representing more than 200 Indian guest workers, who were alleged to have been defrauded and exploited in a labor trafficking scheme engaged in by Signal International, a Gulf Coast marine services company, an immigration lawyer and an Indian labor recruiter. The parties were alleged to have lured hundreds of workers to Mississippi and Texas shipyards with false promises of permanent U.S. residency. For more than two years, Fredrikson represented 10 Indian guest workers in a case filed in the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Texas. Its pro bono team played a significant role in preparing the divergent cases for trial and through settlement, which includes a \$20 million dollar payout and apology from Signal's Chief Executive and President. The team has been headed up by Minneapolis-based litigation shareholders Sten-Erik Hoidal, Lousene M. Hoppe and Timothy M. O'Shea. Fredrikson's team also includes, Andrew F. Johnson, Haley Waller Pitts, Benjamin R. Tozer, Chelsea Brennan DesAutels, Johanna M. Franzen, David D. Coyle, Steven R. Kinsella, James E. Dorsey, Joann M. Landkamer, Clinton E. Cutler, Krithiga Ganesan and Maureen E. Young. Fellow law firms that were involved in the litigation include Crowell & Moring; Skadden Arps; Covington & Burling; DLA Piper; Kaye Scholer; Kilpatrick Townsend & Stockton; Latham & Watkins; Manatt, Phelps & Phillips; McDermott Will & Emery; Sahn Ward Coschignano & Baker; Sutherland Asbill & Brennan.

The Larry Stigen Team worked for more than seven years to secure VA medical benefits for their client, Larry Stigen, a Vietnam veteran. Stigen was just 18 years old in 1969 when he enlisted in the service and was shipped to Vietnam. He suffered

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both physical and psychological injuries during an intense battle soon after arriving in Vietnam. His commanding officers refused to acknowledge or address his injuries, and ordered Stigen back into battle. Wounded, in a state of shock and suffering what we now know as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, Stigen went AWOL. After turning himself in, Stigen was given a “less other than honorable” discharge, which left him without any military benefits, including those that would help him heal from his PTSD. In 2009, Stigen reached out to Patrick R. Burns, a former JAG officer and volunteer, who then requested assistance from Fredrikson & Byron. John Satorius, Patrick Mahlberg and the team filed appeal after appeal with the VA, meeting rejection at every turn. At last, after bringing in experts and representatives from the Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs to lead the final appeal, the VA acknowledged that Stigen is entitled to disability benefits due to PTSD. After nearly seven additional years of waiting for recognition of his service, Stigen and his team count this as a partial victory – the next step is to have his discharge upgraded under the new Hagel rules regarding review of PTSD claims for veterans of the war in Vietnam.

Fredrikson & Byron is a 275-attorney law firm based in Minneapolis, with offices in Bismarck, Des Moines, Fargo, St. Paul, Monterrey, Mexico, and Shanghai, China. Fredrikson & Byron has a reputation as the firm “where law and business meet”. Our attorneys bring business acumen and entrepreneurial thinking to work with clients, and operate as business advisors and strategic partners, as well as legal counselors. More information about the firm is available at www.fredlaw.com. Follow us on LinkedIn and on Twitter @FredriksonLaw.