

10 Under 40: Simpson Thacher's Jonathan Youngwood

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Thursday, February 15, 2007 --- Though he was involved in one of the most-watched securities fraud cases in history, Simpson Thacher & Bartlett's Jonathan Youngwood points to a pro bono victory as the accomplishment of which he is most proud.

In representing JP Morgan Chase & Co. in the sprawling litigation stemming from the collapse of energy company Enron Corp., Youngwood spent years flying around the country taking depositions and appearing in court.

But working on an extensive pro-bono trial as a young lawyer prepared Youngwood for the rigors of complex litigation.

Youngwood led the team of Simpson Thacher attorneys that succeeded in proving that the New York City public school system did not provide a constitutionally adequate education. The case, which was decided after seven-month trial, is considered to be one of the largest pro bono matters ever undertaken by a private law firm.

In working on the case, Youngwood gained invaluable insight into the intricacies of litigation, something that many young attorneys have to wait years for.

"I spent the better part of two to three years litigating this case," he said. "It got me into the courtroom as a young associate, taking depositions and examining witnesses. It turned into a seven-month bench trial, by which time we had close to a hundred witnesses and thousands of trial exhibits. I started on that case when I joined the firm in 1995 and the case has only recently been concluded.

Youngwood points to the case as an example of how varied his career has been, despite having been with a single firm for his entire tenure in private practice.

"I have been at Simpson Thacher since October 1995, but I've been able to do so many different things that even though I've been in one place it's like having been in different places. The path that I've take to get to where I am has been fascinating, but what ties it together is complex litigation and dealing with clients that have very significant problems in an easy, efficient and effective manner."

Youngwood had the chance to put his skills to the test when Simpson

Thacher client JP Morgan was named in several suits following the accounting scandal at Enron.

Beginning in 2002, Youngwood and his team were faced with several challenges. Not only were the allegations complex, they were also being filed in state and federal venues across the country.

“It wasn’t just one case, it was hundreds of cases all over the country,” Youngwood said. “Our first goal was to try and control the litigation. While every plaintiff has the right to be the master of their own case, there are things you can do to make it easier for your client. We spent a fair amount of time consolidating federal cases, removing the state cases to federal court and then trying to transfer them from several federal courts to one common place.”

Throughout the case, Youngwood was able to rely on Simpson Thacher’s expertise in a wide range of matters to help him navigate the technical details of the matters at hand, which he said gave him a leg up when it came time to litigate.

“One of the tremendous advantages I had was resources at the firm, not just in the litigation department but in the firm as a whole,” he said. “If you have a complex matter that deals with an issue you’re not familiar with, you have corporate partners, tax partners and real estate partners available to team with you so you too are an expert.”

The case presented technical, legal and strategic challenges, but it also made the struggle to balance work and family even more difficult.

“Two of my three children were born during Enron,” Youngwood said. “All the attorneys that worked on the case have given up counting the number of children and marriages that happened during the litigation. For me, my clients are tremendously important and you can only do what you’re doing if you’re as responsive as you can be. But if you don’t balance with family, there’s no point in doing all of this. In the end, you have to make sure you make the flight home Friday afternoon so you’re home for the weekend.”