

LAW WEEK

COLORADO

2012 compleat lawyers

THIS YEAR'S Compleat Lawyers represent a compleat picture of the law in Colorado: litigators, small firm practitioners, and transactional attorneys. This group of attorneys are special because they're so well-rounded: they excel in their area of legal expertise, they generate business, promote their firms' values, give back to their communities and somehow still have time to nurture personal and professional relationships. That combination makes them a compleat package.

*To learn more about why we spell 'compleat' this way, check www.lawweekonline.com. Photos and Illustrations by SARAH OVERBECK

jay tiftickjian

WHEN DEFENSE ATTORNEY Jay Tiftickjian questions a prosecution's expert witness in a driving-under-the-influence trial, he doesn't always have to rely on his expert witness to refute their testimony. He can do it himself.

The attorney at Tiftickjian Law Firm has made a specialty out of DUI defense, an area previously thought of as an add-on to any lawyer's practice. He's done so by hosting conferences with nationally recognized experts and taking the time to work in a testing lab to understand the process inside and out.

It's worked out well. Tiftickjian's firm is coming up on its five-year anniversary. His practice has thrived in part because of his laser focus on the area. He said so many lawyers with specialties in other areas will take DUI cases because they consider it easy work. Tell their client to take a blood test, plead guilty and wrap up the case. A quick paycheck.

But he said the science behind the area has changed so much in the last decade, and with some recent controversies around the accuracy of testing labs, he says doing DUI defense work, and doing it well, requires a specific set of skills.

The law wasn't always on his radar. He graduated with an English degree from State University of New York at



Buffalo. He recalled working during his undergraduate years on a road construction crew, work that he dryly says "taught me that I definitely wanted to do something with my brain." Law school turned out to be the answer.

While working with a local attorney during law school, he discovered an interest for DUI cases.

"These are the cases I like because my clients aren't bad people," he said.

After graduating from law school in

2000 and moving to Colorado two years later, he worked for two years in the district attorney's office in Adams County where he saw the flipside of the work he wanted to do. In that office, he learned how prosecutors think and what sways them. Their biggest fear, he said, is that someone picked up in a DUI case will reoffend and that it will come back on them.

"It's about presenting your client and all the mitigating circumstances," he said.

Sometimes it's also about the science, which forms the backbone of many DUI cases. He has taken it upon himself to become an expert in the area. Contrary to common thought in the defense community — that lawyers are competing for expertise and clients — Tiftickjian has sought to broaden the knowledge of everyone in the small-but-growing community of DUI defense attorneys.

His seminars on the science and law in the area have helped.

"Does it help the competition? Sure it does," he said. "But the more knowledge we collectively have, the more success we're going to have for our clients." Then he added, almost as confession. "Plus, I get to learn what I want to learn from experts and don't have to fly across the country and leave my family for a week."

This April, he also spent a week at Axion Lab in Chicago, one of the preeminent chromatography testing centers in the country. For days, Tiftickjian worked running the machines, taking them apart and repairing them. All this for the client, he said.

"When I walk into court, I believe I'll know more than government's expert," he said. •

— James Carlson, JCarlson@CircuitMedia.com