

BUSINESS

This lawyer is stepping up as legal star Fieger continues stroke rehab



Summer Ballentine

The Detroit News

Aug. 29, 2026, 12:03 a.m. ET

As legendary attorney Geoffrey Fieger continues rehabilitation after suffering a debilitating stroke more than three years ago, his longtime mentee and partner is stepping up to lead the growing Metro Detroit firm that Fieger founded decades ago.

A year after buying Fieger's shares of the private law firm, Fieger Law President and CEO James Harrington said Friday that he still regularly briefs Fieger, who is 75, and is hopeful he will return to practice someday at the Southfield firm. But Harrington, 49, said Fieger's larger-than-life everyday presence in the office and in courtrooms is missed.

"He was tenacious in the courtroom, fierce in the courtroom, and probably one of the hardest-working guys I ever met," Harrington said. "And that attitude doesn't stop. He's still putting the exact same mindset into rehab and trying to get better. If I could wave a magic wand and bring him back to come back so I can fight with him side-by-side, I would, and I still have optimism that one day he will heal and recover and be able to talk to juries again."

"So he is making progress. He's working hard, and that's my hope."

Most known for his work in the 1990s successfully defending Jack Kevorkian, an advocate for physician-assisted suicide known as "Dr. Death," Fieger exhibited a flashy personality and starred in prolific commercials promising wins for his clients, helping him rise as a legal megastar.

He stepped back from the practice after [suffering a stroke](#) on March 1, 2023, following an elective procedure "to deal with a minor heart arrhythmia," his wife, Keenie Fieger, said at the time. The family has requested privacy.

Harrington was serving as the practice's vice president and managing partner at that time.

He said buying Fieger's shares was "a formality" and pointed to the firm's growth under his leadership; staffing is up to 90 employees from 60 in March 2023, he said, and he's hired seven new lawyers.

"The most important thing to take away is that the law firm is just doing great, and we're growing, and we're delivering justice across the country for our clients. And that's really the most important thing," said Harrington, who declined to disclose the amount of the sale. "I know that people want to talk about shares, but that's really very unimportant to the overall mission."

Harrington, who began his workday at 3:30 a.m. Friday, said Fieger's hard-working ethos remains a guiding force at the firm.

"The methodologies and the ways of Geoffrey are instilled in every single one of us, top to bottom, to achieve courtroom excellence and just work really, really hard to get top-notch results," Harrington said.

Veronica Valentine McNally, director of Michigan State University's Geoffrey Fieger Trial Practice Institute, said in an email that she commends Harrington's "stewardship of a firm that has made a lasting contribution to the profession."

"I am confident he will continue to build on the strong foundation established under Mr. Fieger's leadership," Valentine McNally said.

Fieger's legacy

Fieger's father began his law career in 1950, when he partnered with attorney George Lee to open the second interracial law firm in Michigan, according to Fieger Law.

Fieger joined his father at the practice in 1979. His rise to fame began in the 1990s while he was defending Kevorkian, a pathologist who assisted 130 suicides.

During a series of eight cases brought against Kevorkian, Fieger used what some described as a "scorched-earth approach," lashing out at prosecutors as the national media watched. He painted Kevorkian as a doctor of goodwill and those he helped die as suffering from incurable diseases.

In more recent years, Fieger has represented families of people killed by police as well as a student who was wounded during the 2021 Oxford school shooting.

More: [\\$50M wrongful death lawsuit filed in case of mentally ill man shot by Detroit police](#)

He ran for governor in 1998 as a Democrat, pouring millions of dollars into his campaign. He lost to Republican John Engler, then a two-term incumbent.

Fieger, a Michigan State University alumnus, donated \$4 million to establish the namesake Trial Practice Institute in 2001. The law school celebrated the program's 25th anniversary on March 19 with an event that Fieger attended. He's rarely been seen in public since his stroke.

During the event, Dean Michael Sant'Ambrogio described Fieger as a "nationally recognized trial attorney — and a fierce champion of plaintiffs' rights and civil justice."

“He believes trial lawyers are called to speak for those whose voices might otherwise go unheard — and that the art of advocacy must be preserved,” Sant’Ambrogio said in a March statement about the event. “A look around this room confirms that the TPI is fulfilling that promise.”

Valentine McNally said Fieger has an “extraordinary legacy in legal education and trial advocacy” that continues to shape the profession.

She said Fieger’s support for such programs “has provided invaluable opportunities for aspiring lawyers to learn from accomplished practitioners and develop the skills essential to effective representation.”

New leadership

Fieger hired Harrington as a law clerk in 2001 as Harrington was finishing his law degree at the University of Detroit Mercy Law School.

As the new leader of the firm, Harrington admitted he doesn’t bring the outsized personality that Fieger did. He trains at an elite Metro Detroit gym and maintains a meticulous diet. He recently vacationed in Alaska on a backcountry backpacking hunt, carrying a 60-pound bag for 150 miles.

“Geoffrey is one of a kind, and if I try to be like Geoff or try to emulate him, or if anybody tries to be like Geoff and emulate him, they’re going to fail because they’re not being authentic to themselves,” Harrington said. “And when I had to become leader of the firm, I have to lead with what I believe is a way that’s authentic to me because if I’m not authentic to who I am, the jury is going to see right through it. All of my team members, everybody in that building is going to know that I’m not being authentic.”

He said he’s still committed to the values Fieger brought to the firm.

“I have so many just beautiful memories and fond memories of working alongside the greatest trial lawyer that Michigan has ever seen — the greatest trial lawyer that

Michigan will ever see," Harrington said. "He is the best. He is the GOAT. So I miss him dearly, and I'm thankful for this opportunity to continue the legacy."

sballentine@detroitnews.com

Politics Editor Chad Livengood contributed.