Steven M. Gursten
Lawyer of the Year

In 2001, Michigan Lawyers Weekly named Steven M. Gursten as one of our “Up & Coming Lawyers.” And, boy, were we right.

From the day he got his license to practice law, Gursten has impressed. He began his career by becoming the youngest lawyer in Michigan history to receive a million dollar jury verdict. Perhaps the most notable aspect of the verdict, though, was that it was in Oakland County—where juries are known to be more conservative—on a soft-tissue injury case in which Allstate was offering only $100,000. Gursten ultimately settled the case for more than five times the insurer’s $100,000 policy limits.

Gursten did not slow down after that. In fact, in the six-year period from 1998 to 2004, he secured the largest reported auto accident verdict in Michigan three times. Considering the fact that approximately 4,000 Michigan attorneys say they specialize in car and truck accident cases, it becomes even more impressive. He is one of the best in the business, capping it off with his biggest year to date, our timing couldn’t be better.

**Q** When you settled the Norris case in July, it was the biggest auto injury settlement in Michigan in nearly 10 years. That distinction was short-lived, however, as we learned of an even larger verdict shortly thereafter. What can be learned from your experience?

**A** Practicing law is a humbling experience, and I am reminded of that every day. I handle cases with defense lawyers around Michigan, and some of them are among the brightest and best lawyers in Michigan. The other settlement was an outstanding settlement and the lawyers handling it did very good work. That case involved an out-of-state resident and they were able to exploit it to achieve a great settlement. My own case was different because I was dealing with a Michigan resident, who had almost no economic damages, and the $9 million was almost entirely pain and suffering. It was settled four days before trial.

**Q** Tell us a little bit about your other big victories this year.

**A** I don’t like to call them victories. I help people. It is about my client, not me. I am helping people who have no one else to turn to, who often are disabled from work, not getting paid medical benefits or wages they are owed. You are dealing with insurance companies that insure the car or truck that caused these injuries to begin with that seem to do almost anything to avoid being held accountable for the injuries that they cause.

**Q** Unlike a lot of other plaintiffs’ lawyers, you don’t advertise to the public. As such, how are you able to get such big cases?

**A** It’s funny. We don’t advertise. We don’t even have an ad in the Yellow Pages. We don’t have commercials on television. With the exception of running some small ads in your newspaper and having an Internet website, we don’t do any advertising, but we are the largest firm in Michigan specializing in handling serious car and truck accident cases.

**Q** Most of our biggest cases come from other lawyers. Success seems to build upon success. And, hard work makes luck. No one works harder than I do. I also think it helps because we are so sub-specialized in only handling serious car and truck accident cases, that the lawyers in our office will often see things sooner or are forced to deal with something sooner than most other lawyers.

**A** We already have the work product. But remember, law is a humbling profession and I deal everyday with some very smart lawyers. I am constantly seeing new things and learning new things. I am lucky that I work in an office with other excellent lawyers, and I am lucky that I am able to practice law with my dad. I’m third generation here, and it’s a lot of fun working with him. There are a lot of outstanding trial lawyers here to bounce ideas off of.

**Q** Aside from Kreiner, what is the biggest challenge you face as an auto lawyer?

**A** (Laughing) Patience. You want to help everyone. I see so much injustice. You can’t just be in it for the money, you have to really like people and want to help them. People really don’t understand how bad it is here in Michigan. We have no bad faith law, no punitive damages, no jury runaways, companies treat people in ways, and get away with things here, that they can’t in most other states.

I have a wonderful wife and beautiful little girl who I love to spend time with, and you have to be careful because this job, you could easily work 24 hours a day, seven days a week if you let yourself. I believe good lawyers always find more to do on cases, not less, and there is always more you can be doing.

- Lynn Patrick Ingram