

MINNESOTA LAWYER ATTORNEYS OF THE YEAR 2012

“Don’t Settle For Less” is James Behrenbrinker’s motto. The slogan adorns each page of his Behrenbrinker Law website, along with the portrait of a dignified and imposing lion. The brand message — defender, fighter — suits Behrenbrinker, who has spent decades representing individuals in cases involving all types of personal injury, discrimination and employment law, civil rights and criminal defense.

In recent years, Behrenbrinker has gained prominence representing individuals in police-misconduct cases. In October 2010, a federal court jury awarded one of his clients just over \$1.8 million in an excessive force lawsuit against the Minneapolis Police Department. At the time, it was considered among the highest payouts ever in a lawsuit stemming from officer misconduct in Minneapolis.

In November 2012, Behrenbrinker won a \$750,000 settlement for the family of Tyler Heilman, a 24 year-old man who was shot and killed by a Le Sueur County sheriff in July 2009.

“This was a big, important case because this shooting divided the community,” said Behrenbrinker. “Law enforcement had rallied behind the officer’s story, and the parents wanted to vindicate their son. To a certain extent, this settlement gives [the parents] some vindication and most importantly this 4 year-old [Tyler Heilman’s son] will receive monthly payments starting on his 18th birthday.”

Behrenbrinker has been in solo practice since 2000 and acts as of-counsel to the Schaeffer Law Firm. He decided to go solo because he was frustrated working in larger firms that didn’t offer him the flexibility and freedom to have the kind of direct connection to individuals that he now has working for himself.

“I found out that it’s really rewarding and satisfying to represent individuals,” said Behrenbrinker. “If I can help them help themselves it’s a good feeling.”

Behrenbrinker also serves on the Private Attorney Conflict Panel for the U.S. District Court in Minnesota. He calls his work for the panel “a privilege” and an extension of his desire to help those who can’t afford to retain a private attorney.

“I’ve been [on the panel] 20-plus years, and I still view it as important work,” said Behrenbrinker. “Everyone has the right to a zealous representation.”

—Marisa Helms

James Behrenbrinker Behrenbrinker Law

