

Rising Star: Gibson Dunn's Avi Weitzman

By **Jamie Santo**

Law360, New York (March 28, 2013) -- Whether bringing down high-profile securities scammers for the federal government or helping Gibson Dunn & Crutcher LLP bring in a billion-dollar settlement from Dish Network Corp., Avi Weitzman has built a reputation as a quick-witted litigator, earning him a place among five young white collar attorneys recognized by Law360.

The 38-year-old Weitzman, one of Law360's Rising Stars, joined Gibson Dunn as of counsel in June 2012 after a six-year stint as an assistant U.S. attorney that saw him take on some of the largest insider-trading cases.

"I relish the opportunity to be in court, to argue motions and try cases — that's where I think I have an advantage," he told Law360. "After 12 trials, it's where I feel most comfortable. What attracted me to Gibson Dunn was this firm does not shy away from trying cases."

While Weitzman's new job presents him with different types of cases, it still allows him to bring his abilities to bear.

"I've been very fortunate and privileged that the skills I learned at the U.S. Attorney's Office have so seamlessly translated," he said.

Weitzman was able to display those skills soon after signing on as he joined the Gibson Dunn trial team representing a unit of Cablevision Systems Corp. in a breach of contract case against Dish Network.

"We really litigated it almost as a fraud case," he said, and weeks into a trial — after the team relentlessly pursued and uncovered smoking-gun evidence from allegedly privileged documents in the middle of trial — Gibson Dunn was able to secure a billion-dollar settlement that included a \$700 million cash payment.

A native New Yorker with a bachelor's from the University of Kentucky and a law degree from Harvard, Weitzman never envisioned himself as a federal prosecutor.

“It was not a lifelong goal of mine,” Weitzman said. But his time as a clerk for U.S. District Judge Shira A. Scheindlin changed the picture.

“I immediately bonded with the prosecutors,” he said. “I wanted to emulate their style, their ability to think on their feet.”

Time only served to strengthen that conviction, and after four years in the law he heeded the call and joined the U.S. Attorney's Office in New York.

“It wasn't just a training ground, it was a perfect fit for who I wanted to be,” Weitzman said.

As part of the securities and commodities fraud task force, he proved instrumental in Operation Perfect Hedge, an investigation that brought in some of the largest insider trading cases ever seen.

Going after Raj Rajaratnam, the then-head of the Galleon Group, he successfully defended the government's use of wiretaps. In convincing the trial judge to put the kibosh on a motion to suppress, he secured evidence that led to a conviction and an 11-year sentence for the hedge-fund king.

When the government decided to go after the so-called “matchmakers” who put inside informers and hedge-fund traders together, Weitzman was named lead prosecutor in the first case.

Compiling a mass of evidence against Winifred Jiau, an expert network consultant for Primary Global Research, he was able to expose her role as a middleman for hire.

In June 2011, a federal jury found Jiau guilty on charges of conspiracy and securities fraud for selling hedge-fund managers tips about technology company earnings in advance of public announcements — reports that were often accurate down to the decimal point, Weitzman said.

“What was amazing to me was how brazen the criminal conduct really was,” he said, noting that emails Jiau sent to her informants were no different than the way drug dealers mask their conversations.

Weitzman was drawn to Gibson Dunn by partner Orin Snyder, one of his mentors, as well as the unique opportunity the move presented.

“There wasn't another firm I saw that is litigating at their level, working in a number of industries,” he said.

At Gibson Dunn, Weitzman gets to dabble on both sides of the aisle, working to keep defense clients out of the limelight while still getting to appear on the main stage.

Currently, he's part of the Gibson Dunn team representing Chevron Corp. as it pursues a racketeering suit over a \$19.2 billion pollution judgment that allegedly stems from a global extortion campaign, working to prepare for an October jury trial.

Weitzman is no newcomer to international racketeering, having brought down an Israeli boiler room operation and a violent Albanian crime ring during his time in the U.S. attorney's organized crime unit.

Going after telemarketers whose scams bilked U.S. citizens out of millions of dollars, Weitzman parlayed his command of Hebrew and bona fides earned during his time as a clerk at the Israeli Supreme Court to convince authorities to extradite more than 20 people, leading to multiple convictions.

When he handled the Albanian case in 2008, it was a cold affair involving a series of hot crimes including racketeering, murder, arson and narcotics trafficking. Presented with just one lead, a suspect under suspicion, Weitzman was able to flip that subject, a bold move that brought down the the entire crime ring.

The case led to the conviction of 16 individuals — including one who had fled the U.S. to become the chief aide to Albania's deputy prime minister — and hammered home a lesson that guides Weitzman today.

“I learned a single piece of evidence can unravel an entire scheme.”

--Editing by Jeremy Barker.

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