

John F. Schaefer

Courtly Lawyer

“Contrary to television portrayals, divorce cases can be resolved in a dignified and amicable manner that preserves the integrity of the parties.” This statement, made by attorney John F. Schaefer, conveys the philosophy upon which he has built his reputation for settling divorce disputes for wealthy and well-known individuals without public exposure, and with as much honor and decorum as is possible. He cringes at lawyers whose opportunism and lack of professionalism have given the legal profession a black eye. Schaefer says, “In an era when lawyers tend to be aggressive to the point of being obnoxious and overbearing, there are a few of us who still handle our clients’ matters in a dignified way.”

Schaefer, known for being both honorable and reserved, has been practicing matrimonial law for 35 years. Clients from Michigan, New York, Florida, Illinois, New Jersey, and elsewhere have regularly sought him out to represent them in divorce actions where millions of dollars have been contested — and, in at least one case, where more than \$1 billion was at stake. While Schaefer is most noted for his expertise when it comes to matrimonial law, his firm also negotiates contracts for media personalities, as well as buyouts and golden parachutes for leading business executives.

Even though matrimonial cases are technically public proceedings, Schaefer believes divorce cases are painful enough for the individuals without attracting the scrutiny of the media and one’s neighbors. Although he’s able to protect the privacy of his clients, Schaefer has frequently found himself thrust into the limelight of his profession because of his success and personality. He regularly appears on radio and television programs discussing legal topics, including matrimonial law. He has served on the Board of Trustees and as an adjunct professor of law at the Michigan State University College of Law, and he holds an honorary Doctor of Laws degree. He is listed in all editions of *The Best Lawyers in America*, and has been named one of America’s top attorneys in both the December 2005 and December 2006 issues of *Worth*



Magazine, in their annual listing of the nation’s top 100 attorneys.

In addition to his personality and sincere concern for his clients, other keys to Schaefer’s success are his superior financial acumen and the seriousness with which he maintains the confidences of his clients. While many of his cases gain public notoriety which might provide interesting anecdotes or provide fodder for a television miniseries, Schaefer refuses to discuss the details of any of his cases, stating that the confidences with which he is entrusted by his clients are “sacrosanct,” and he will take them to his grave. In addition, his ability to fully understand and appreciate the complex finances, businesses, and economic needs of his clients contributes to his success. “Divorce cases of the 21st century require the ability to understand tax returns, financial statements, retirement plans, business valuations, stock options, tax consequences, and a plethora of other financial components,” he says.

Often asked whether he typically represents husbands or wives, his response is, “For every

Robert Lutz (former president of Chrysler Corp.) or Walter Buhl Ford III, I have also represented a Peggy Iacocca (former wife of Lee Iacocca) or Jennifer Nasser (former wife of Ford Motor Co. CEO Jacques Nasser).”

In addition to his courtroom accomplishments, he is also involved in numerous professional, civic, and philanthropic organizations. He was an instructor at the Michigan Judicial Institute, educating hundreds of Michigan circuit court judges in the substance of matrimonial law. He’s the president of the Oakland County Bar Association, and he serves on the board of directors of the Oakland County Bar Association and William Beaumont Hospital. As past president of the Bloomfield Hills Country Club and a member of the exclusive Everglades Club in Palm Beach, Fla., Schaefer often finds himself in the same social circles as his clients, giving him a unique understanding of their concerns.

Schaefer’s reputation as one of America’s finest matrimonial attorneys is well deserved, according to his colleagues. One well-known local lawyer who has battled Schaefer in the courtroom gave him the highest grades for his professionalism, fairness, results, and commitment. When the legal profession is under such intense scrutiny, it is refreshing to know that one of the pinnacles of the profession practices and resides in our community. He and his distinguished partners, Mark A. Bank and B. Andrew Rifkin, have offices in Birmingham and Grosse Pointe.

The Law Firm of John F. Schaefer

380 N. Woodward Ave. Suite 320
Birmingham, MI 48009
248-642-6655

130 Kercheval
Grosse Pointe Farms, MI 48236
313-881-1300