

Internet Pioneer Now Sits at Helm of Giant Immigration Firm

LESLEY J. GUDEHUS | *The Daily News*



Gregory "Greg" Siskind is founding partner of Memphis-based Siskind Susser PC Immigration Lawyers, which recently merged with New York-based Eric Bland Law Firm to form Siskind Susser Bland PC. Siskind now is a partner in the newly formed firm.

With the merger, Siskind Susser Bland just became one of the largest immigration law firms in North America, with offices in Memphis, New York, Atlanta and Nashville. The company has affiliate offices in 12 countries through its participation in Visalaw International, the global immigration lawyers' alliance.

Besides having one of the largest health care immigration practices in the United States, the firm also represents fashion model management companies, circuses, individual artists and athletes, record labels and more.

In addition, Siskind Susser's Web site, www.visalaw.com, was the first immigration law firm Web site at its launch in June 1994 and one of the first law firm Web sites in any category.

Siskind graduated magna cum laude from Vanderbilt University in Nashville in 1986 with a degree in political science. Born in Louisville, Ky., and raised in Miami, he earned his law degree at the University of Chicago in 1990. Siskind has written several hundred articles on immigration law and is the author of the book "The J Visa Guidebook," published by Lexis-Nexis. He is married and has three daughters.

Q: How did you become interested in a career in law?

A: I was first interested in a career in Washington doing something involving working on legislation. I thought a law degree would give me a stronger background for a job of that sort. Once I entered law school, however, I ended up losing interest in D.C. and instead decided to come back to Tennessee and explore different legal fields until I could decide what I wanted as a career.

Q: What excites you about immigration law?

A: I help people every day realize their dreams and



Memphis Law Talk



Name: Gregory "Greg" Siskind

Position: Partner

Company: Siskind Susser Bland PC

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"I help people every day realize their dreams and aspirations, and unlike other areas of law, when I win a case, there is no loser."

- Greg Siskind

aspirations, and unlike other areas of law, when I win a case, there is no loser. I philosophically believe immigration is vital for the country and that makes it very easy to wake up and go to work.

Q: What are the demographics of your client base?

A: We can count the number of countries where we have not had clients on just one hand. As one of the largest immigration law firms in the U.S., and as one of the only immigration law firms in Memphis, we represent a diverse mix of clients. We handle family-sponsored cases, employment-based visas and investor visas. We represent some of the largest employers in the world with immigration matters, and at the same time represent oppressed refugees seeking asylum in the U.S.

On any given day, I may see a world-renowned cancer researcher, an acrobatic star, a foreign-born U.S. citizen sponsoring a parent for a green card, and a nurse recruited to help fill the shortage of nurses in America.

Q: What were the reasons for your merger with Eric Bland Law Firm?

A: I met Eric Bland about a year ago in a meeting in London and learned about his practice then. His New York-based firm had one of the nation's largest entertainment and fashion immigration practices in the U.S., including handling the majority of the foreign fashion model cases filed each year - more than 500 - [and] the BBC, a number of Broadway production companies, many of the best-known fashion design firms, and so on.

A few weeks after we met, Eric had a case to refer to our firm that involved an interview of a client at the Memphis [U.S. Citizen and Immigration Services] office, and then we met again when I was speaking at a conference in New York.

Over breakfast in New York, we discussed how each of our firms had been approached in the past about mergers, and we began to realize that our firms had a lot in common and that there might be a significant opportunity to build a powerhouse immigration firm if we joined forces. Over the next six months, we met several times in New York and Memphis, and by the time we were ready to merge in August, we felt we knew each other quite well.

Q: What advantages will the merger bring?

A: There are a number of benefits. We can transfer much of the casework from New York to Memphis, where our overhead is much lower. Our combined arts and sports practice is probably the nation's largest, and we will now be able to more effectively market to entertainment and sports-industry clients. Before the merger, we already had one of the largest health care immigration practices in the U.S., and we

will now be able to pursue more work in the Northeast. As a larger firm, we can achieve a number of cost savings particularly in purchasing goods and services.

More lawyers mean more knowledge. In other words, we can further sub-specialize and ensure clients get the most sophisticated advice available. We have a larger financial base on which to grow into new geographic markets, including our latest office in Las Vegas.

Q: How did you become a pioneer in Internet business development?

A: Well, I wrote a book on this subject for the American Bar Association titled "The Lawyers Guide to Marketing on the Internet," so it is hard to answer briefly, but in my case, timing and luck had a lot to do with it. I was leaving a large law firm in Nashville in 1994, without clients and with very little money to start a practice. As a new immigration lawyer in a state with what I perceived, incorrectly, to be a small immigrant population, I needed to figure out how to get clients from out of state - immigration law is a federal practice area so it is common to represent clients at a distance.

Nineteen-ninety-four was the year the Web started to enter the American consciousness, and I happened to have a friend from college who started one of the first Web hosting companies in the South. He was looking to show off Web sites for "normal" businesses and I needed a cheap way to get the word out about my practice. The Web was the solution for me at a time when there was no competition there - and being early paid off. The best Web sites are really publishing vehicles for law firms, and our firm has really been focused on making quality information available to the public via the Internet. We've been rewarded handsomely for this commitment with millions of hits and enough business for our firm to grow from a solo lawyer to one of the nation's biggest practices.

Q: What is the most satisfying aspect of your work?

A: I spend my day interacting with truly outstanding people. We have a clientele that represents many of the top people in their fields and who are making important contributions to the country. I work with people from all over the world and now look at everything in life with a more open-minded perspective. I work with superb colleagues -not just the lawyers, but our staff - who are all committed to delivering excellent legal services for our clients as well as helping to take our firm to new levels. But the most satisfying part of the job is the fact that we've been able to help thousands of people and employers over the years. We're lucky enough to win most of the time, and there is nothing better than giving a client good news about his or her case.

Q: How do you define success?

A: I can't define success for others, but in my case, I wanted to do interesting work, help people, be my own boss, earn good money, and balance it all with a good family and personal life. Achieving that balance is the toughest part these days.