

# Daily Journal

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Top

100

Lawyers  
2022



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100 | PETER K. STRIS

STRIS & MAHER LLP  
LOS ANGELES  
APPEALS, ERISA,  
COMPLEX BUSINESS  
LITIGATION

**P**eter K. Stris and his firm are perhaps best known as appellate attorneys. Stris himself has argued 10 cases before the U.S. Supreme Court plus prevailed against petitions for certiorari in several more.

He insists, however, that he and his firm are primarily trial lawyers. “That’s the bread and butter,” he said.

“We focus on major legal disputes where our firm’s involvement can be transformative,” Stris said. “We’ve become known ... as the place that you go when there’s something unusual and novel about the dispute, and it’s going to require the development and execution of a legal strategy.”

In what he considers one of his biggest victories, a jury found his client liable for false advertising to a competitor who was seeking as much as \$61 million, plus trebling. By the time the case had gone through a jury trial, a court trial, an appeal and a retrial, the plaintiff received just \$60,000 plus costs. *Grasshopper House v. Clean & Sober Media*, 2:18-cv-00923 (C.D. Cal., filed Feb. 2, 2018).

The plaintiff ran a high-end rehabilitation treatment center in Malibu, while Stris’ client had once owned a competitor but later purchased an online news and review site about the industry. The site published a scathing, one-star review of the plaintiff’s facility, prompting the litigation. After the jury’s adverse verdict, Stris got the plaintiff’s

lone damages expert disqualified with a Daubert motion.

“Once there was no more damages expert, there was nothing left to do,” he said. “We just didn’t come back to court.” The judge then excused the jury and held a court trial on the equitable remedy of disgorging profits. In that second trial, Stris was able to put in evidence that the plaintiff also had posted false advertising, so the judge only awarded \$60,000.

His firm handles all manner of complex civil litigation, but he has developed real expertise in the very complex area of ERISA. He currently is defending the city of Seattle’s special wage law for hotel workers’ health care and is hoping the Solicitor General’s office will advise the Supreme Court to deny cert. Advocating before the SG’s office has “become an important, strategic piece of Supreme Court practice,” he said.

And he is handling several appeals challenging identical arbitration provisions that have begun showing up in many pension plans. He argues that the provisions violate a portion of ERISA that allows representative actions. He will argue one such case before the 3rd Circuit in November. *Henry v. Wilmington Trust NA*, 21-2801 (3rd Circ., filed Oct. 1, 2021).

“It’s a really important issue,” he said.

— Don DeBenedictis