



Lawyer's long run as Ninja Turtle counsel ends

By Mass. Lawyers Weekly Staff

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The Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles may single-handedly fight crime across the globe, but they owe a good chunk of their success and their recent mega-million-dollar sale to a lawyer from a small firm in Northampton.

More than two decades ago, Turtles co-creator Peter Laird, a North Adams native, crossed paths with Frederick U. Fierst, today a member of the seven-attorney Fierst, Pucci & Kane.

Laird had accumulated a tidy sum of money - and quite a following - for his Ninja Turtle cartoons, which he created in 1984 with fellow comic-book artist Kevin Eastman.

But organization was an issue.

"The first time Peter came to see me, I remember he opened up his wallet and had something like \$6 million worth of checks on him," Fierst says. "He said, 'I could use some help. I'm starting to get these big checks, and all I have is a checking account.' When I called his bank, they said, 'Thank God. He really needs some assistance.'"

Fierst, an entertainment lawyer who began his career in New York, set up Laird with a money manager and helped structure his business.

"They had been operating as a pop-and-pop store with a bunch of their good friends who were artists," Fierst says. "Mostly everything was done on a handshake - if that."

With a legally sound business plan in place, Michelangelo, Donatello and the rest of the bandana-wearing crew catapulted onto the scene in the late 1980s.

"I have done all the work for the Turtles ever since," Fierst says. "We have worked together through 400 television episodes, four feature films, probably 20 video games and literally billions of dollars of retail products. I was the official lawyer for the Turtles until two weeks ago."

It was at that time that Laird, who bought Eastman's share of the company a few years ago, agreed to sign his name on the dotted line for a \$60-plus million sale to Viacom, the parent company of the children's network Nickelodeon. Fierst says the deal, which has consumed most of his time for the past 18 months, also involves the purchase of the intellectual property rights from Laird's Mirage Studio and television distributor 4Kids Entertainment.

Fierst, who says he'll miss all the action and jet-setting that comes with representing the Turtles, has used his experience with Laird to diversify his client base over the years.

"Every time somebody introduced me, I didn't want them to say, 'This is Fred Fierst, the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtle lawyer,' even though that's part of who I am," he says. "It's too narrow. It's typecast. It's one thing."

Fierst says he turned down multiple requests to work exclusively for the Turtles, instead building one of the strongest entertainment law practices in the country with clients in the television, movie and gaming industries.

"I am one of the top entertainment lawyers in the world," he says. "I know it sounds terrible, but it's true. There is absolutely no sadness to this deal. I think for all of us it was time to move on."