

Northampton attorney's video-game expertise leads to personal, professional opportunity

By: Kris Olson | April 30, 2015



A Northampton attorney's long-held expertise in the video-game industry recently opened the door to a global speaking engagement, and an intensely personal journey.

Frederick U. Fierst, a senior partner at Fierst, Kane & Bloomberg, expected to be the only American in attendance when he arrived at the Hotel Kempinski in Vilnius, Lithuania, on April 24 for the Games Industry Law Summit. The event's organizers — members of the leading Lithuanian law firm Sorainen — are longtime friends

and business associates of Fierst, who planned to offer the American perspective on three panels: one on mergers and acquisitions; another on conflict resolution; and a third on the relationship between business development executives and lawyers in the interactive world.

But Fierst may not have made the trek had it not also presented a rare opportunity to return to his ancestral roots. In 1900, his then-16-year-old Jewish Zionist grandfather, Harry Pincus Fierst, fled to the United States from Birzai, in what is now Lithuania, to avoid being conscripted into the Russian czar's army for 25 years. Fierst's grandfather and his friends (among them the father of actress Suzanne Pleshette) escaped in a hay wagon, Fierst says.

Without that fateful decision, Fierst may well not be here today. While the region enjoyed a brief period of peace and harmony among Jews and non-Jews after World War I, that would come to a horrific end at the beginning of World War II. Nazis and their Lithuanian anti-Semitic allies rounded up and killed many of the Jewish men upon the Germans' arrival in Birzai in late June 1941. Then, on Aug. 8, 1941, the remaining 2,400 Jews in Birzai, including 900 children, were taken to a forest site outside of the city, where they were forced to dig trenches into which their



bodies would be dumped after they were shot to death.

While Fierst had time to spend only a few hours in Birzai, it promised to be a moving and memorable visit. Escorted by the curator of the Birzai Historical Museum, Fierst planned not only to visit the monument to the Jews not as fortunate as his grandfather but also the site of Leba's Inn, named after another of his ancestors. He also was told that there is a solitary Jew currently living in Berzai, with whom he hoped to speak.

From there, it was on to the Games Summit, where his reputation proceeded him. Fierst's involvement in the video-game industry began in the early '90s, occasioned by a ComicCon speaking gig in which he discussed his work on behalf of the creators of the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles. Fierst had helped the quartet of crime-fighting reptiles make the leap from the pages of comic books onto TV screens and toy-store shelves, and a member of the audience — noted game designer David Perry of Northern Ireland — figured (correctly, as it turned out) that Fierst could work similar magic for the title character of his company's successful game, "Earthworm Jim."

Perry is still a client. In 2012, Fierst helped Perry sell to Sony, for a paltry \$380 million, a company Perry had founded in 2008 — Gaikai, which has innovated the use of cloud-based technology to allow online streaming of video games.

Fierst's work for Perry put him "on the radar" of industry leaders and led to far-flung speaking engagements. Today, Fierst, Kane & Bloomberg's client list includes some of Europe's largest interactive and entertainment studios, including wargaming.net out of Belorussia, which has 75 million active users of its games "World of Warplanes," "World of Tanks" and "World of Warships," Fierst notes. There's also Paradox Interactive of Sweden; 1C-777 of Moscow; Alternativa Platform of Perm, Russia; Tale Worlds of Ankara, Turkey; CD Projekt of Warsaw, Poland; Techland of Wroclow, Poland; Larian of Ghent, Belgium; Yager Developments of Berlin, Germany; and Deck 13 Interactive of Frankfurt, Germany; as well as various European interactive publishers.

The field may involve leading-edge technology, but there's nothing new about how he built up such an impressive global client base, Fierst says.

"It's like everything in law: You do a good job and word spreads," he says.

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