

DOMINIC J. CECERE & DANIEL OBERDORFER

LEONARD, STREET AND DEINARD, P.A.

MINNESOTA LAWYER
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Most Minnesotans pledge allegiance to one of two newspapers — the Star Tribune or Pioneer Press.

The papers have a healthy competition going, sometimes described as a sibling rivalry. But the relationship got downright ugly in March 2007 when Par Ridder — once heir apparent to the now-dissolved Knight Ridder chain — left his job as publisher of the Pioneer Press to become publisher and CEO of the Star Tribune.

Turning coats isn't against the law, but sharing confidential information is. And soon after his departure from the Pioneer Press, allegations surfaced that Ridder took with him some prized financial data.

To get at the truth, Dominic J. Cecere and Daniel Oberdorfer — shareholders with Leonard, Street and Deinard in Minneapolis — had to start digging.

As counsel for the Pioneer Press, both attorneys got involved with the issue in early April, shortly after Ridder was told to return a Pioneer Press laptop and USB drive. Computer forensics showed that information had been transferred from the laptop to Star Tribune computers. And as for the USB drive, Ridder didn't give back the original, but a new one — still shrink-wrapped in the box.

Based on this chain of events, the attorneys knew they had a case. "We had very good evidence early on," Cecere says.

The Pioneer Press filed suit against the Star Tribune, Ridder and several other executives on April 12. About a week later, District Court Judge David C. Higgs ordered a temporary restraining order and expedited discovery in the case.

"I think the amount of detail in the complaint really helped our cause," Cecere says.

Within the next few months Cecere, Oberdorfer and a sizeable support staff burrowed through 10 of the Star Tribune's hard drives, 91 of its server backup tapes, four home computers and two USB drives. This effort produced more than 30 terabytes of data — or somewhere in the neighborhood of 60,000 filing cabinets worth of documents.

The two attorneys also took 64 depositions in California, Colorado and Florida, as well as around Minnesota, in just 37 days.

"It was two years of litigation condensed into two months," Cecere says.

At one point, Leonard, Street and Deinard had three shifts of document reviewers working on the case. The firm also set up a private computer network for collaboration.

"When you move that fast on a case, one of the things that became important to us was communication," Oberdorfer says. And he knows a thing or two about communicating under deadline pressure — before becoming a lawyer, Oberdorfer was a 12-year beat reporter at the Star Tribune.

For both attorneys, the case was emotional and required personal sacrifice. But it was worth it. In September, the judge told Ridder to step down and ordered the Star Tribune to cover all legal fees.

The two attorneys say they couldn't have succeeded without the support of a good team.

"Aside from the fact that we won, and aside from the fact this was a high-profile case, the most rewarding thing was working with a great group of professionals," Oberdorfer says.

Cecere agrees: "If it were just Dan and me, we never would've gotten this done."

— Michael Krieger



DOMINIC J. CECERE

Born: April 13, 1962; Chicago

Education: William Mitchell College of Law, J.D., 1990; St. Thomas College, B.A., 1984

Employment: Leonard, Street and Deinard, shareholder, 1999-present; Doherty, Rumble & Butler, attorney, 1990-99

Professional Associations: American Bar Association; Hennepin County Bar Association; Minnesota State Bar Association; State Bar Association of North Dakota; State Bar of South Dakota; State Bar of Wisconsin

Community Activities: Children's Law Center of Minnesota

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Personal: Wife, Allison; two children



DANIEL OBERDORFER

Born: July 5, 1957; Charlotte, N.C.

Education: University of Minnesota Law School, J.D., 1992; University of Michigan, B.A., 1979

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