

# CRAIN'S

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## 40 UNDER 40

Forget the dweeby stereotype: Patent law rocks, especially at law firms like Adam Mortara's, which prefer to litigate rather than settle cases.

"It's sexy because patents are becoming the primary motivating force in a lot of business battles," Mr. Mortara says.

As in the mobile phone industry, with Google Inc.'s takeover of Motorola Mobility Holdings Inc. and its cache of 17,000 patents. Or Big Pharma's patent-infringement claims against generic drugmakers.

Still plentiful are old-fashioned, David vs. Goliath patent brawls pitting individual inventors against giant corporations. Jacob Krippez Sr., founder of Aurora machine shop Jake's Inc., alleged Ford Motor Co. stole his idea for a side-mirror lamp and won a judgment in 2009.

Mr. Mortara led the trial's second phase, arguing Ford's violation was willful. A federal judge here agreed and more than doubled the jury's award to \$56 million. (Ford appealed; an attorney for the automaker declines to comment. Mr. Krippez died last year at age 79.)

The budding scientist-turned-patent lawyer is a well-worn career path that Mr. Mortara has trod at the highest level. After earning a master's degree in astrophysics at England's Cambridge

**HOW HE UNWINDS**  
**"GO TO SUPPORT MY SOCCER**  
**CLUB . . . IN LIVERPOOL."**

University, he switched from a doctorate program in chemistry at the University of Chicago to its law school and later landed a Supreme Court clerkship with Justice Clarence Thomas. At client Nicor Inc., his brief is broader than patent law. The Naperville utility uses him as a legal resource, advising CEO Russ Strobel, assessing risk and reviewing the work of other Nicor lawyers.

"If they don't like it, I'd fire them," says Paul Gracey Jr., Nicor's general counsel. "They realize he's the smartest guy in the room."

*Steven R. Strahler*



Photograph by: Erik Unger