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Hibbing lawyer gets state-wide honor

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MINNEAPOLIS—Hibbing lawyer Edward Matonich was welcomed into elite company this past week after being named one of 15 Attorneys of the Year by the *Minnesota Lawyer* newspaper. He joins only 55 others so honored by the publication in the past six years.

At an awards program held in Minneapolis on Feb. 24, Matonich was recognized for winning a \$1.9 million dollar suit against Blandin Paper Mill in a case where two electrical workers were exposed to a chemical cleaner used to cleanse paper making machines. One worker suffered severe lung problems, while the other incurred significant damage to eyes and lungs.

Minnesota Lawyer yearly solicits nominees from the legal profession, thereafter applying strict criteria for award winners who join "very select company" for the prestigious award. Featured speaker James H. Gilbert, a former Minnesota Supreme Court Justice, acknowledged the "significant service to the profession and the general public" made by this year's nominees.

Nurtured on working class roots by a grandfather killed in the mines and a father who worked as a mining electrician, Matonich has always prided himself on his "strong sense of justice for workers and the 'little guy'" as being the driving force behind his advocacy for clients. He is selective about his cases, taking only those clients whose causes he sincerely believes in.

A graduate of the University of North Dakota Law School, Matonich returned to Hibbing in 1968 to practice law after a three year stint as a tax attorney for Standard Oil of Indiana. Joking that his wife of 37 years, Judy, said, "Goodbye, God, we're moving to Hibbing" when he announced his plans to her, Matonich says that he realized a dream come true when able to return to his home town to practice law.

No stranger to large settlements for his clients, Matonich has won a number of multimillion dollar lawsuits, including a \$13.4 million dollar verdict in 1982. That case marked but one of dozens of courtroom victories over the past four decades for a man who rarely loses a case tried in front of a jury. Matonich has, in his own words, a penchant for "comforting the afflicted and afflicting the comfortable."

That success in the court room and his dedication to putting heart and soul into his work has earned Matonich the highest of honors among his fellow Minnesota lawyers—Attorney of the Year for 2004.