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Brownsville Native Is Among 'The Best Lawyers in America'

By Elizabeth Stull
Brooklyn Daily Eagle

A Brownsville Youth

"I grew up very, very, very poor," Salenger told the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*. With no father and a chronically ill mother, "we were like a welfare family," Salenger said, "dependent on handouts." His older sister, Esther, put off college and worked to support the family. His older brother, Ken, also helped out, before going to fight in Korea. Even Salenger's grandfather contributed.

NEW YORK — Growing up poor in Brownsville, Brooklyn, Marvin Salenger always dreamed of becoming a lawyer. After more than 25 years in practice, he was recently identified as one of the best.

He will be included in the 2006 edition of "The Best Lawyers in America," a national referral guide.

Being in this directory won him a spot in a *New York Magazine* list of 'The New York Area's Best Lawyers.'

Even more significantly, Salenger has won the respect and admiration of his peers. Just last week, Martindale-Hubbell notified him that he has been awarded an AV Peer Review Rating, which recognizes a lawyer's "professional excellence."

But Salenger said he's not in practice for the glory. His eight-attorney trial practice specializes in the labor-intensive areas of plaintiff-side personal injury and medical malpractice. For Salenger, it's about helping the little guy.

"I have this real desire to help poor people, and that's been my whole life," Salenger said. "I don't want to sound like Mother Theresa, I just like fighting for the underdog." His commitment was born in the rough streets of Brownsville in the 1940s and '50s.



Brooklyn native Marvin Salenger,
'One of the Best Lawyers in America.'

Salenger vowed that he would do something to help others who, like his family, lived on the edge.

He graduated from Thomas Jefferson High School and worked odd day jobs to put himself through Brooklyn College at night. He took his teacher's license in 1961 and chose an inner city school where he "could give something back" while earning money for law school.

"In teaching, you can make a direct impact upon kids," Salenger said. He taught social studies at Berryman Junior High School, No. 64, in East New York, and became a guidance counselor there. While at Berryman, he enrolled in Brooklyn Law School as a night student.

Taking On 'Work No One Else Wanted'

After law school, he worked with Manhattan attorney Norman Bobowick. When Bobowick retired in 1980, Salenger started his own firm, with partner Bob Sack. They began with small cases and haunted the courthouse to pick up the "work no one else wanted."

"I would do depositions, I would just try to get enough money to make payroll," Salenger remembered. "And then as you grow in competence, your reputation grows." Twenty-five years later, Salenger said most of their clients come from attorney referrals.

These days, some of the best lawyers in Brooklyn send cases to Salenger's firm. Former Brooklyn Bar Association presidents George Farkas, and Barry Kamins send civil

work his way, and had only good things to say about the civil attorney.

"He's a very zealous advocate," said Kamins, a prominent criminal law attorney on Court Street.

"I believe that his sincerity and his belief in the case come across to jurors, which results in a verdict for his client," said Farkas, who also practices criminal law on Court Street. "[Salenger] wears his heart on his sleeve and he is truly a genuine human being."

Salenger attributes his firm's success to hard work and the care expended on each case. "What's fascinating about the type of work we do, is, just think of someone who's poor, or disabled, or worse — and how are they going to be compensated? Doctors and hospitals have access to the best lawyers. How is this poor person going to get compensated?"

Salenger said his firm only takes contingency fee cases. This means the attorneys do not receive fees unless they win some compensation for the client. The ability to make payment contingent on success reflects the firm's financial stability, as well as confidence. Since it started, the firm has grown to eight lawyers, with seven staff and four partners in Manhattan and Long Island offices. Its founders still think of the office as a family.

"My partner [Bob Sack] is my best friend. I'm a lucky guy. We like hanging out with each other and we never have a quarrel," Salenger said. "I think of him as the best inside man in the business — meaning he runs the office, he's a genius at preparing the cases."

The most rewarding part, for Salenger: "We change people's lives for the better."