

Lawyers' lawyer Upenieks serves local and legal communities

By [AdvocateDaily.com](https://www.advocatedaily.com) Staff



Brampton civil litigator [Edwin Upenieks](#) is every inch the lawyer's lawyer.

During more than three decades at the bar, Upenieks, partner with [Lawrence, Lawrence, Stevenson LLP](#), has become particularly well known in the province's legal community for his niche practice in solicitors' assessments and costs. Over the years, he has acted with more than 60 law firms involved in legal fee disputes with clients as well as on behalf of individual clients.

Even outside his assessments work, Upenieks tells [AdvocateDaily.com](#) a large chunk of his litigation practice originates with referrals from colleagues at the bar.

"Often, they come from people I've run into on the other side of files," he says, "That's always a great compliment — I know I must be doing something right."

But his career would not have turned out that way if Upenieks' mother and father had their way. Like many immigrant parents, they wanted a doctor in the family, and in his younger days, he was happy to oblige, loading up on science and math courses at high school.

However, Upenieks' math teacher, Mr. Wilson, was the first with an inkling that his skills may be put to better use in court. The teenaged Upenieks had volunteered to write the solution to a challenging problem in class and proceeded to fill the blackboard with a proof the teacher had never seen before.

"Mr. Wilson didn't think I'd done it right, but he said my presentation convinced him and suggested I'd make a good lawyer," he says.

Initially unsure about the recommendation, Upenieks stuck with science courses during his undergraduate studies at the University of Toronto, before giving in and applying to law school. In 1983, he was called to the bar in Ontario after obtaining his LLB from Osgoode Law School.

Still, it would be a while longer before he found his calling in civil law since Upenieks originally had his eye on corporate law before an articling rotation in the litigation department at a Bay Street firm opened his eyes.

"I thought you had to be flamboyant and outgoing to be a litigator, and I was neither of those things," he explains.

Upenieks now chairs Lawrences' litigation practice group, having built a broad practice that has taken him numerous times to Ontario's Court of Appeal and seen him emerge as successful counsel countless times in reported decisions from all levels of court.

He says he has learned to adapt his style depending on the needs of individual clients. And that can take some work with a client base as varied as his since his practice covers corporate and commercial litigation, partnership and shareholder disputes, real estate litigation, expropriations, estates litigation and more.

"It's certainly never repetitive work," Upenieks says.

“Then there are always some files that don’t fit a mould,” he adds, pointing to his representation of the father and sister of a teenager shot dead on a streetcar by a Toronto police officer, which involved accompanying family members through the criminal trial of the officer and subsequent [appeal](#).

But there are certain constants, no matter the identity of the client.

“You have to be civil and courteous, but at the same time, you need to push hard for your client’s position,” Upenieks says. “I think I’m caring and compassionate with clients, and very detail-oriented. I spend a great deal of time preparing myself and my clients for the experience when they have to testify at trial or during examinations.”

In 1998, the Law Society of Ontario certified Upenieks as a specialist in Civil Litigation, and he is also a graduate of the Harvard Mediation Program.

Outside of the courtroom, Upenieks has played an active role in the legal community, serving as president of the Ontario Bar Association in 2015, as well as speaking and writing frequently on legal topics, including the textbook he co-authored, *Enforcing Judgments and Orders*, and is near completion of the third edition of *Dispositions Without Trial*.

“Another thing I really like doing is working with younger lawyers and students, to mentor them and give them opportunities to shine,” he says.

Many local organizations have also reaped the benefits of Upenieks’ volunteer and fundraising work, including Brampton’s William Osler Health Centre Foundation, of which he was the founding chair. He currently sits on the board of directors of the Headwaters Health Care Foundation.