

# 'We've Never Tried to Be the Biggest': PI Firm Stewart Tilghman Fox Bianchi & Cain Puts Relationships Over Scale

By Vivienne Serret

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## What You Need to Know

- Since 1984, Stewart Tilghman Fox Bianchi & Cain has devoted itself to the representation of personal injury and litigation cases nationwide.
- The firm has five partners and one associate, each dedicating extensive time to the few cases the firm decides to take on.

Rather than take on the caseload and scale of many contemporary personal injury firms, leaders at Miami's Stewart Tilghman Fox Bianchi & Cain are adamant that their four decades-old strategy is the most resourceful and solicitous to clients. The firm prioritizes taking on a small number of cases with its six-attorney team carefully dedicating all its time and resources to each one.

Rather than assigning large teams or delegating complex matters to junior associates, every case at the firm is handled exclusively by the firm's five partners and one associate. The firm turns down 90% of cases looked at to effectively treat the cases it does take on as the "only" one,



Courtesy photo

**(l-r) Stephen Cain, David Bianchi, Gary Fox, Dax Bello, and Michael Levine, with Stewart Tilghman Fox Bianchi & Cain.**

according to partner Gary D. Fox, who noted that though the firm may wind up hiring more, he and his partners are currently comfortable with its size.

"Everybody in the firm knows each other, likes each other. We've got a good relationship," Fox said. "The fear is always that if you start growing, you lose a little bit of that intimacy that I think the smaller firms have, the bigger ones don't."

One of the firm's notable, nationally publicized cases involved University of Missouri student Danny Santulli, who consumed excessive alcohol while attending fraternity pledge event in 2021. After collapsing from alcohol poisoning, Santulli was ignored for hours. By the time he had been rushed to the hospital, he stopped breathing. Though doctors were able to resuscitate him, Santulli was left with catastrophic brain damage that left him permanently blind, unable to walk or talk and dependent on lifelong care.

His family sought counsel from Stewart Tilghman attorneys David W. Bianchi and Michael Levine, who spent two months preparing a 26-page complaint against 24 defendants.

After just nine months of individual negotiations, all 24 defendants agreed to settle—for every penny of available insurance coverage, without discounts. The case concluded without a single deposition and was settled before a full police report had been released.

"The Santulli case, it's an example of us being called on for our expertise, but somewhere that's not home—we're not Missouri lawyers, we're not licensed to practice there, we still got the call because of our reputation and experience doing these cases," Levine said. "We associated with local counsel, dug into what the law was in Missouri, and immediately rolled up our sleeves and quickly filed a pretty extensive lawsuit."

Levine recounted a phone call with three sisters in their 20s who lost their best friend, their father, highlighting the significance of maintaining a personal and close relationship with a client who needs an attorney at their worst moment.

"Those people deserve to have their lawyer available to them, and not have to call and leave messages with 15 other assistants and maybe get a call back days later. I don't think that's right," Levine said. "All of our clients have our cell

phone numbers, and I think that is a big level of comfort they have that: 'Hey, when we hang up this call, if you have another question that comes up, just send me a text or call me back. Don't worry about it. You're never a bother.'"

In a 2001 hazing case, Bianchi and attorney Steve Cain represented the family of Chad Meredith, a University of Miami freshman who drowned during a hazing incident. Despite widespread skepticism, including assertions that the case was unwinnable because Meredith had consented to swim and was not yet a pledge, the firm took the case to trial.

After a one-week jury trial, they secured a \$14 million verdict, the largest hazing verdict in U.S. history.

Following the case, Bianchi drafted amendments to Florida's anti-hazing law to eliminate defenses raised in the Meredith case and strengthen penalties. The legislation passed unanimously and was signed into law by Governor Jeb Bush on the University of Miami campus, becoming known as the Chad Meredith Act. In 2025, for his work in the area of fraternity hazing, Bianchi received the Trial Lawyer of the Year award from the Florida Chapters of the American Board of Trial Advocates, the organization's highest honor recognizing excellence in civil trial advocacy, a distinguished career, and dedication to the civil jury trial system.

"We've never tried to be the biggest," Bianchi said. "We've always tried to be the best—for the people who put their trust in us."

The firm has continued to invest significant time and resources drafting and advocating for new legislation to expand protections for victims. For instance, Cain, who serves on the Board of Directors and the Executive Committee of the Florida Justice Association, is allowed time off from his legal work to spend time in Tallahassee,

lobbying on behalf of victim's rights in negligence cases.

For the last 20 years, Cain has worked on legislation within the plastic surgery space, ensuring more justice for victims of medical malpractice.

"We've got a cottage industry down here that markets these fast, quick mommy makeovers all across the country. They get people to fly in. These facilities are using doctors that don't own the facilities. They're getting paid by the surgery that they do, and they're out there maiming and killing folks," Cain said. "We've been pushing bills for the better part of 20 years, and recently made some traction in that regard to where we've got a couple of things in the law that have proven helpful on our cases."

And A. Dax Bello, another attorney at the firm, has procured into the nine-figures in settlements and verdicts for the firm's clients in a wide range of cases. He has also helped recover more than \$30 million for governmental agencies resulting from his work in whistleblower matters.

The former assistant state attorney said the firm takes a very holistic approach to practicing law.

"The one thing that I think that we all share is that we care. We want to be there for our clients. We want to get them the best result possible, because their one day in court is everything to them," Bello said.

In one case, a 46-year-old father of two was electrocuted at work. A prior firm concluded no recovery was possible, but Bello and Levine, who took on the case, disagreed. In just three months of filing suit, the two secured a \$2 million settlement—the full amount of available insurance. Last year alone, Levine and Bello resolved two additional workplace injury cases for \$3.75 million and \$4 million, including a case involving a warehouse worker crushed by an 18-wheeler driven in violation of federal hours-of-service laws.

Currently, the firm is awaiting a decision from Florida's Sixth District Court of Appeal in *Costello v. Olson*, a case involving the death of minor league baseball player, Ryan Costello, from a treatable cardiac condition. Despite multiple dispositive motions and complex jurisdictional challenges, the firm has repeatedly prevailed and reinforced its reputation for persistence and depth in high-stakes litigation.

"In 2017, we got one of the biggest verdicts for an older plaintiff in Florida. She had a stroke, and there's malpractice involved. Steve Cain and the whole team was crying after that verdict came down, hugging her daughters and just being there for them," said Carol Goraczko, a paralegal at the firm. "It was this big moment, because you're living this terrible experience with them for years, and then you get to this moment where it ends, and it's a relief, and it's a bond."