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Rich Orton is the firm's managing partner and represents clients in a wide variety of complex cases in forums throughout Wisconsin and the United States. Rich's trial practice focuses on products liability, general liability, professional liability, and commercial, construction and insurance litigation and appeals. These matters typically involve a myriad of damages related to personal injuries, property damages, and other commercial or business losses.

Rich has represented a wide variety of clients in products liability litigation, from small local retailers to large multinational manufacturers. He has significant experience as a member of the national trial counsel teams for one of the world's leading manufacturers of compact farming and construction equipment. Rich's products liability experience has included defending consumer, commercial and industrial products in a variety of industries, including automotive, consumer products, medical devices, construction, agribusiness, heavy equipment, trucking and transportation. In addition to this litigation work, Rich also has experience counseling companies on product liability, product safety, risk assessment, and claims management issues.

Rich regularly handles matters at all stages of their lifespan – from the prompt investigation of accidents and evidence preservation, through pre-suit negotiations, discovery, trial and appeal. Rich assists clients in developing and executing the most efficient and effective strategies in all phases of dispute resolution. He has experience handling some of the most complex claims, involving catastrophic injuries, fire and explosion accidents, and massive property damages.

In 2022, Rich was elected Chairman of the Board of Directors of Wisconsin Lawyers Mutual Insurance Company; he has served as a director since 2017. Rich served on the Board of the State Bar of Wisconsin's Young Lawyers Division from 2014-2018. He has also served on various committees of the Eastern District of Wisconsin Bar Association since 2012, and was elected to its Board of Directors in 2019.

Rich stays involved in the Milwaukee community through a number of volunteer efforts and his service on the Board of the Brady Street Area Association (2017-2021).

Prior to joining Gass Turek, Rich was a shareholder at one of Wisconsin's largest civil litigation firms. Rich attended the University of Wisconsin Law School, where he was a member of the Moot Court Board and Mock Trial Team. He won the Ruby R. Vale National Corporate Law Moot Court Competition's best brief award, and worked as a law clerk for the Wisconsin Governor's Office of Legal Counsel. Prior to law school he worked as a paralegal at a large multinational law firm in Washington, D.C. He obtained his undergraduate degree with honors from Marquette University, during which he spent two terms studying law and public policy at the University of Oxford in England. Mr. Orton was born and raised in Mauston, Wisconsin.

Representative Experience

- Won a motion to dismiss with prejudice as local counsel on behalf of a major U.S. auto manufacturer in a purported product liability class action against it. The class action complaint raised a variety of claims based on an alleged defect in a certain generation of truck engine. (E. Dist. Wis., 2021)
- Won an appeal to the Wisconsin Court of Appeals on behalf of a manufacturer of heavy excavation equipment, involving the application of the economic loss doctrine to claims against the manufacturer resulting from a fire. *Secura v. Super Products LLC*, No. 2018AP1600, 2019 WL 3432520 (Wis. App. July 31, 2019).
- Secured a favorable verdict as first chair trial counsel for a construction company in a fire loss case involving allegations of negligent installation of a fireplace and chimney system after a four-day jury trial in Lincoln County, Wisconsin. (2018)
- Obtained a defense verdict in 2017 on behalf of a heavy equipment manufacturer as second chair in a five-week products liability jury trial in Sonoma County, California. Plaintiff sought \$26 Million in damages after losing an arm and a leg as a result of a rough terrain forklift (“telehandler”) tip-over incident. Thereafter, successfully defended the defense verdict on appeal. *Verrazono v. Gehl Co.*, 50 Cal. App. 5th 636, 263 Cal. Rptr. 3d 663 (2020), *review denied* (Aug. 12, 2020).
- Secured two subsequent dismissals of the case of an injured plaintiff clearly engaged in forum shopping, one in Cook County, Illinois, and the other in Lake County, Illinois, on behalf of a major national organizer of outdoor music festivals, ultimately resulting in the settlement of the claim for nuisance value. (2016)
- Received a favorable verdict on behalf of a printing company in a forklift accident case in Milwaukee County, Wisconsin (second chair). (2016)
- Successfully first chaired a bench trial in St. Croix County, Wisconsin, securing a favorable decision on behalf of a health insurer that resulted in the full reimbursement of the client’s subrogation claim. (2015)

Awards, Affiliations and Admissions

Honors

- Super Lawyers Rising Star, 2017-2021
- Best Lawyers in America 2022 – Products Liability Defense and Construction Litigation
- Fellow, Wisconsin Law Foundation (2017 Inductee)
- 2016 Wisconsin Law Journal “Up and Coming Lawyer Award”

Professional Organizations

- Federation of Defense & Corporate Counsel (FDCC)
- Litigation Counsel of America (LCA), Associate Fellow
- State Bar of Wisconsin
 - YLD Board, 2014-2018
- Illinois State Bar Association
- Thomas E. Fairchild Inn, American Inns of Court
 - Associate Member, 2013-2016
- Milwaukee Bar Association
- Eastern District of Wisconsin Bar Association
 - Board of Directors, 2019-Present
- Defense Research Institute (DRI)
- Wisconsin Defense Counsel (WDC)
- Claims & Litigation Management Alliance (CLM)

Bar Admissions

- State of Wisconsin
- State of Illinois
- U.S. District Court - Eastern District of Wisconsin
- U.S. District Court - Western District of Wisconsin
- U.S. District Court - Western District of Michigan
- *Multiple pro hac vice admissions in state and federal courts from New York to California*

Presentations & Publications

- Presenter, “Discovery in Products Liability Cases,” annual equipment industry product liability seminar, August 2021.
- Presenter, “Recent Developments in the Evolution of the Economic Loss Doctrine,” Wisconsin Defense Counsel Annual Conference, August 2020.
- Author, 2019 supplement to Requests for Admissions chapter in *Wisconsin Discovery Law and Practice*, State Bar of Wisconsin Pinnacle books, 5th Ed.
- Presenter, “Anatomy of a Products Liability Claim,” annual equipment industry product liability seminar, May 2019.
- Presenter, “Pretrial Techniques”, State Bar of Wisconsin, September 20, 2018 (covering motions to compel discovery, summary judgment and *Daubert* challenges).
- Presenter, “Writing it Right: Avoiding Litigation Risks in Technical Publication Drafting,” 2018 (multiple locations and clients).
- Presenter, “Dig Deep and Extract the Truth: How to use the Latest Digital Forensic Technology to Win Your Cases,” State Bar of Wisconsin Annual Meeting and Conference, June 21, 2018.
- Co-Organizer, “Common Evidentiary Issues and Pitfalls,” State Bar of Wisconsin Annual Meeting and Conference, June 15, 2017.
- Moderator and co-organizer, “From the Bench: Practical Tips for Litigants”, State Bar of Wisconsin Annual Meeting and Conference, June 16, 2016.
- Presenter, Annual Wisconsin Legal Update, annually, 2015-2019 (multiple locations / clients).