

**SANDY
MALL**

Champion in the Fields of Estate Planning, Elder Law and Special Needs

by Kristine Lenneman



FARMINGTON HILLS—Advocacy is a strong passion in Sanford J. Mall’s life and career. The founding partner at Mall Malisow & Cooney PC has dedicated his legal career to guiding elder law and special needs clients to satisfying solutions in a world with complex and often confusing laws involving such programs as Medicare and Medicaid.

Mall and his family remember he always wanted to be a lawyer. His grandfather was very proud of his grandson’s career choice, although he never practiced in the profession. As the family patriarch, his grandfather’s story inspired Mall at about age 4 to dress up in a sport coat and stand at the door anxious to go out into the world.

While other children were heading to the school bus, he was dressed professionally with his briefcase instead of a lunch box. When people would ask why he was dressed in a sport coat, briefcase in hand, Mall explained

that he was a lawyer ready to go to work. Such behaviors were the start of a great legal career.

That career didn’t begin in young adulthood, however. Mall’s formal education was delayed due to family circumstances. Immediately after high school, he joined the family business that was started by the family patriarch. Recognizing Mall’s aptitude and skill for the business, his grandfather stepped back and allowed him to run it for several years.

Although successful in that career, Mall had a constant yearning for his work to contribute to society and help make a difference in people’s lives. As a result, the family business was sold, and Mall moved on in his search for rewarding and meaningful work.

After moving into a few other roles, including business management consulting, Mall took a position with a local rehabilitation provider that served clients with closed-head injuries, substance abuse and psychiatric

disorders. He was surrounded by a vulnerable population of adults and their families. Their needs called upon and satisfied his innate desire to be an advocate. Nonetheless, in his mid-30s, married to his high school sweetheart, Harriet, and father to a young son and daughter, his calling to law continued.

A major challenge arrived next in the form of spinal meningitis. Mall contracted the illness that forced a long duration of bed rest, which he describes as the perfect storm.

“The recovery gave me time to reflect,” he shares. Contemplating the course of his life and career with his wife, he began to consider his earlier aspirations of being a lawyer. The timing was not ideal. Mall was in his late 30s, their two children were in middle school, and his wife was finishing up her master’s thesis in psychology. Mall had one complete year of undergraduate college on his resume. He remembers Harriet advising, “Do it, and you

will never regret it.”

After recovery, Mall went back to school and completed the three remaining years of his undergraduate work in half that time. He applied and was accepted to the Wayne State University Law School. By then, his wife had completed her formal education and was the sole breadwinner for their family, working at a psychotherapy practice. Mall graduated law school at age 42 and was ready not only to contribute to the well-being of his family but also to advocate for those most in need and make a meaningful contribution to his community.

“I wanted to make a difference and advocate for people,” Mall says about his start in the legal profession. “I felt like I could be a good interpreter.”

He began his legal career representing injured workers and auto accident survivors as well as victims of asbestos exposure in the Motor City’s automobile factories. His strong legal skills were noticed early on as he won over clients with his integrity and determination.

He was also active on civil rights issues, and he received an offer of a fellowship with a non-profit public interest law center to help with social justice cases. However, needing to contribute as much as possible financially to his growing family, he continued to work with the litigation firm, building a reputation as an effective and compassionate advocate for his clients.

Early in his career, Mall spoke with the founding partner of the litigation firm. Having joined the bar later in life, their ages weren’t that far apart. Mall had the opportunity to discuss the beginning of his legal career with a veteran attorney who was closing his out.

Mall asked for advice on his career path, and the partner advised there was considerable potential in elder law because the Baby Boomer generation was about to start retiring. The landscape had only had a few attorneys considered to be experts in the field, said the lawyer. Elder law appealed to Mall’s desire to help make a difference in peoples’ lives, and he took the advice.

SIGH OF RELIEF AMID COMPLEX POLICIES

Mall approached the specialty of elder law with his clients in mind. The myriad policies surrounding estate law, Medicare and special needs can be incomprehensible to a layperson. He recognized that elders and persons with special needs were particularly disadvantaged and vulnerable when they needed to navigate through these complexities. Mall’s earlier career serving a special needs clientele as a rehabilitation provider inspired him to use the law to benefit his clients. When he began this journey, very few lawyers in the Detroit area focused on this area of the law.



Family photo of Mall and wife Harriet with, from left, Jack Hazan and son Judah, Kayla Hazan and son Ezra, Lindsay Mall and daughter Emma, Zak Mall and daughter Lillie



From left: grandchildren Lillie Mall, Emma Mall, Judah Hazan, Ezra Hazan, baby Eli Mall



Embracing 50 years of love, Harriet and Sandy Mall on Belle Isle

In his 23rd year as an attorney, Mall still finds his practice exceedingly rewarding. He greatly enjoys helping families navigate their circumstances—and the drama and trauma surrounding them. Add in the stress of complex insurance, government programs, medical and care services, other systems, and the cost, and life can be overwhelming.

“It’s a priceless opportunity to give families a sigh of relief and some peace of mind during these times,” says Mall. “Sometimes, it’s a spouse or an adult child, and other times it’s the parent of a child with special needs. I want to help make their lives a little easier and take away some of that worry for them.”

Mall continues to accomplish his objective. Each year, he provides education, counsel, assistance and advocacy to hundreds of individuals and families. He helps clients design estate plans that give them peace of mind, and he acts as a guide through the many issues relating to disability and death.

Mall recalls two cases where his advocacy was not only an example of fine lawyering but also may have been lifesaving.

In one, the parents of an adolescent with autism spectrum disorder and significant and potentially violent behavioral problems approached him. They had two younger children and were unable to manage their son at home. As a result, Community Mental Health had placed him in a residential school program where he resided for the three prior years.

In talking with the parents, Mall discovered that the young man had recently come home for a visit, with the staff assisting. During the visit, the young man attempted to attack his much younger sister and was stopped only by three adults restraining him.

The parents had just received notice from Community Mental Health that the county had insufficient funds to pay for further placement, so their son was being sent back home. Mall’s immediate action to appeal the pending transfer prevented what could easily have been a tragedy. Further, through negotiation, Mall got the agency to place the young man in a program better suited to his unique needs.

In the other case, a daughter was advocating for her elderly mother who was in a nursing home. After an emergency admission to the hospital, the daughter learned that poor nursing care had caused a life-threatening pressure sore that had become badly infected, and it was spreading. The emergency room doctor told her this was avoidable and should not have occurred.

Treatment in the hospital improved her mother’s condition, but Medicare would not pay to keep her in the hospital until the sore

healed completely. The daughter contacted Mall when the hospital discharge planner informed her that her mother would be discharged back to the offending nursing home.

Mall’s intervention temporarily stopped the discharge while he tried to arrange a transfer to a safer, more appropriate nursing facility. Over several days, the hospital made numerous attempts to transfer her back to the nursing home. Each time, Mall’s dedicated response prevented the hospital from doing so.

The final incident required Mall to contact the main hospital administrator on behalf of his clients. His actions worked long enough to allow the daughter to find a nursing home willing and able to provide the level of care her mother needed.

Over the years, Mall has become a go-to attorney in the areas of special needs and elder law. Clients appreciate his desire to help people be as autonomous as possible.

His peers recognize his skills as well. He is a past-chair of the State Bar of Michigan Elder Law and Advocacy Section and the National

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Academy of Elder Law Attorneys (NAELA) Government Benefits Section.

Currently, he is on the Institutional Ethics Committee for Beaumont Health and teaches “Law and Bioethics” at the Oakland University William Beaumont School of Medicine.

Mall frequently teaches estate, special needs and elder law planning as well as the legal aspects of health care and mental health to various professionals, including lawyers, doctors, CPAs and financial advisers. He feels compelled to keep an open channel on behalf of all of his clients, especially when it comes to providing services to help the elderly and persons with special needs.

TRUSTED ATTORNEY IN THE AREA

Local attorneys and advocates who have worked with or near Mall praise him for being a trustworthy person and a great critical thinker.

David Shaltz of Chalgian & Tripp Law Offices says the prime test for referring attorneys is whether or not you would

recommend them to your family. “Sandy is certainly one of those guys.”

Shaltz has worked with Mall in cases with complex issues involving government benefits and special needs planning. They also worked together on presentations for the Michigan Judicial Conference and co-presented for the Institute of Continuing Legal Education (ICLE) and the Elder Law and Advocacy Section of the State Bar of Michigan.

Shaltz says Mall is a “unique individual who knows the law very well.” He comes up with “creative ways of advocating for his clients.”

“He is extremely tenacious and doesn’t give up. Yet he does it all in a way that’s not offensive. He is a true gentleman and has a great grasp of the law and the policies underneath it. He is one of the best elder law attorneys in Michigan, if not the country.”

Nancy Welber, of counsel to Ferguson, Wydmayer & Clark, has known Mall personally and professionally for more than 30 years. She knew him before he was a lawyer and has always been impressed by his critical thinking.

“He is one of the premier attorneys in his concentrations of elder law and disability planning, and I say that both subjectively and objectively. He is well-versed, educated and asks the right questions, if needed,” she says.

“Even better, Sandy is a standup guy. If he tells you something, you can take it to the bank. I wouldn’t hesitate to recommend him, and I do so all the time.”

Mehul S. Mistry at Secure Planning Strategies has worked with Mall and his office for at least 15 years. Mistry’s business requires

legal expertise involving questions about social programs, VA benefits and elder law.

“It’s almost like a one-stop-shop legal side,” Mistry says.

Mall is the group’s go-to person when tough questions come up. When they encounter challenges in their work, Mistry says it is great to contact Mall and ensure their clients don’t have to worry about any misunderstandings.

Mall spends much of his personal time with his wife, Dr. Harriet Mall, and their close family. Their two children are now adults who live within a couple of miles of the Mall home. With a fifth grandchild now in their family, Mall has plenty to keep him occupied. His daughter, Kayla, recently joined the firm, learning the law as a legal assistant and helping her father run the practice. When Mall and his wife are not enjoying their family, they like to travel.

The policies around elder law, estate planning and special needs can be difficult to navigate. Fortunately, clients in East Michigan have a dedicated and passionate advocate in Mall. ■