

BAR TALK

The hottest trend this fall: Wall-to-wall class actions

There's no rest for the wicked, or so the saying goes. In the wake of the listeriosis outbreak, law firms across the country have been filing class actions as fast as Maple Leaf Foods has been issuing amendments to its recall list.

Saskatchewan's **Tony Merchant** was first off the mark last week, filing suit in Ottawa. By midweek, he had started suits in six provinces and said he'd already signed up over 1,700 plaintiffs. That remarkably fast work raised eyebrows in some quarters. As you may remember, Maclean's reported that Mr. Merchant said he billed 5,300 hours last year, which could explain a lot.

Next out of the gate was **Harvey Strosberg** of Sutts Strosberg LLP and **Ted Charney** of Falconer Charney LLP – who, together, also handled the class action against Menu Foods Income Fund (fainted pet food). **Ward Branch** of Vancouver's Branch MacMaster has again joined them, as has Calgary's **Clint Docken** of Docken & Co. and **Colin Stevenson** of Stevensons LLP in Toronto.

Oh, expect to see **Steve Stieber** of Stieber Berlach, a top insurance lawyer, leading Maple Leaf's defence.

When you see so many lawyers, there's only one conclusion to be drawn: There's a lot of potential recovery. "That company's got all kinds of insurance and it's backstopped by the McCain family money," confirms someone practised at such assessments. "The company can afford to pay what it'll be asked to pay."

FIRED UP ON PROPANE

Harvey Strosberg and Ted Charney may as well be dating, given all the evenings and weekends they're spending together. As well as Maple Leaf, they're also representing Torontonians who suffered damages in the Sunrise Propane explosions that rocked the city's north end last month. Bar Talk is told seven firms filed class actions and they've already agreed to team up.

On the defence, **Bob Potts** and **Mirilyn Sharp** from Blainey McMurtry LLP are acting for Sunrise's insurers.

And it's not over yet.

Let's just say this is a going to be a busy fall for process servers.
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ON THE WEB

LEXPERT

Behind the closed doors of major Canadian law firms resides a small group of lawyers whose names will never make the front page. Their work saves time and money but goes practically unnoticed by clients who are unaware that they benefit from it.

They are the research lawyers. Even the most academically inclined legal professionals may not be able to handle this unique job. For those who can hack it, analyzing the law can be invigorating.

Lexpert contributor Sandra Rubin explores what it takes to succeed as a research lawyer.
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