



POWER SUITED

We play 20 questions with Chicago's "super lawyer" Joe Siprut, the founder and managing partner of Siprut PC.

By Taylor Morgan

Portrait by Carasco Photography

You chose Biggs Mansion for the site of our photo shoot.

Is this one of your regular haunts?

It is. The mansion has been a private cigar club for the last year and a half. It was originally designed and built in 1874. Fun fact: It's the site of the restaurant scene from *Ferris Bueller's Day Off*, where Matthew Broderick's character pretends to be Abe Froman, the Sausage King of Chicago.

What cigar are you smoking?

It's a 'Siprut.' I have my own label. A professional roller mixes blends of tobacco and wrappers, based on whatever flavor palate we are going for, and makes them for me. I don't sell them retail. I just have them made by the boatload and then I give them away to people. And, of course, I smoke plenty myself.

Did I hear that you have cigars hand-rolled and brushed with gold? Details please.

That is true. One of the cigars we do is a Siprut Gold. The wrapper is infused with gold and you smoke it as is—literally a gold cigar that creates golden ash. I had the idea after seeing some boutique brand that was selling them and looked into it. Turns out you can buy the wrappers. It's a fun conversation piece.

That's a handsome suit. Who are you wearing?

It's Chicago's own Eric Kipp Custom Clothiers. Each suit takes 52 hours to make. Felled and sewn armholes, top collars, under collars, shoulder linings, double-stitched buttonholes... Kipp has done all of my suits for years. He's very skilled and the nicest guy in the world.

What will you be working on when you head back to the office this afternoon?

The thing I like best about my current platform, both the practice of law and running the firm, is that no day is like the other. I might be doing an oral argument in court or preparing for one, meeting with lawyers at the firm about case strategy, reading and keeping up with the law, or a thousand other things. Sadly that list includes emails—a lot of them. I lament the day that email became the norm in communication. I would be quite happy to go back to the days of writing letters and sending them by messenger on horseback. [Laughter]

Your reputation as Chicago's 'super lawyer' for class action litigation precedes you. How did you earn the moniker?

It's always an honor to be recognized by your peers. When I started my firm, the goal was to champion really interesting and high-stakes cases—and make a lot of noise. As we achieved our first major

victories and made some headlines, the business continued to grow exponentially. I like to think there are two things I do well, which I view as the key to success in litigation. The first is that I can solve problems and figure out how to put the pieces together when you are dealing with various and competing interests. Fundamentally litigation is about conflict resolution, and that means problem solving. The second key is having the stomach and the ability to march to the gates of hell if necessary. It takes two to tango, two to settle a case. So while I'm ready to solve problems and try to get a good result for my clients through a brokered resolution, if the other side refuses to do so, guess what? We are going to war.

Your law firm, Sipur PC, has been referred to in the press as a 'high-profile' litigation boutique with a focus on David vs. Goliath cases. Tell us more about your platform and the cases you take on.

Our overall model is to take complex cases against powerful adversaries. I like representing the little guy against the big guy. On a personal level, I feel rewarded when a lawsuit I'm handling directly improves someone's life. It's harder to enjoy that when your client is a Fortune 500 company. I also think the dynamic of being on the plaintiff side suits my personality. I'm full of righteous indignation in my personal life, so it's easy for me to latch on to a client's cause and say, 'Let's get 'em!' [Laughter]

Can you give us an example of a case where a David and Goliath dynamic came into play?

One of our bigger and more recent settlements was a nationwide class action against Southwest Airlines. The gist of the settlement is that Southwest has to honor drink vouchers issued to its premium ticket passengers after it abruptly discontinued the program—about \$30 million worth.

What's it like to work at Sipur PC?

On a cultural level, most law firms are stifling to the point of paralysis. Attorneys can't be themselves out of fear for who they might offend that day, what internal politics have heated up or whatever else. Not at my firm. We don't have the time or energy for that stuff. We're too busy litigating and trying to crush our opponents. [Laughter]

So you spend your days taking on the biggest companies in the country. I imagine that blowing off steam is critical.

How do you destress?

I spent most of my life growing up as a wrestler, following my father into the sport. In college I transitioned into jiu-jitsu, and in law school I started doing mixed martial arts. I kept it up through the first few years I was practicing law, actually. I can remember showing up for work as an associate at my first law firm with two black eyes literally almost every day. The partners would just stare at me in shock.

Do you still practice?

These days I study Krav Maga, which is a fighting system originally designed by the Israeli military that's intended for real-world defense situations, as opposed to mixed martial arts, which is a competition.

Have you ever had to use those skills on the streets of Chicago?

No comment.

Any other, less violent pastimes?

Believe it or not I'm taking a lot of dance lessons—tango and the paso doble. And I play golf, which allows me to combine cigar smoking, alcohol consumption and business development—and I get to claim it as exercise. For the efficiencies alone, that's hard to beat on paper.

Tell us about this year's annual Sipur Foundation charity golf outing. You had a great turnout last year to benefit PAWS Chicago.

This will be the third year in a row for the Sipur Foundation charity golf outing. All of the proceeds go to PAWS Chicago. It's held at Harborside International on Aug. 9 and I'm telling you, it is a fantastic day of golf. Last year we had cigars hand-rolled on the course, a hole-in-one prize of \$1 million—no one won, unfortunately—and several dogs up for adoption running around. If you are reading this article, you're invited!

You have two rescue dogs. What are their names?

Sammy, a miniature border collie, and Rusty, an Australian shepherd mix.

What prompted you to adopt?

My dog Buddy, a border collie that I adopted 15 years ago, died last year. I loved that guy so much, it just killed me. A few months later, my friends at PAWS started sending me emails and pictures of rescue dogs and asking if I wanted to meet them. One in particular had lost a leg—PAWS had to amputate it when they rescued him—but they said he had the most wonderful spirit. I thought, well, I'll just go take a look and say hello. Nothing more. Of course, I should have known at that moment that I was bringing Sammy home that night. And I did. A few months later, Rusty was added to the family.

All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy. Any big travel plans?

In a week I'm headed to L.A. to play golf. It's the first recreational trip for me in quite awhile. I've been trying to get to Japan for a few months now, but it's hard to find a window for travel where I have like 10 days in a row unencumbered. My goal is to eat sushi at Sukiyabashi Jiro. However, last I heard sushi master Jiro Ono was like 90-something years old, so I better get moving.

Is there a motto you live by?

Be authentic. Be yourself.

Tell us one more thing people should know about you.

I always follow through on what I say I will do.

And, last but not least, because inquiring female minds want to know: Are you single?

I am, and I appreciate you asking. [Laughter] We have to make sure the record is clear on such matters. *sl*

For more information on Sipur PC and the Sipur Foundation charity golf outing taking place Aug. 9 at Harborside International, visit sipur.com.