

FACES IN THE CROWD

Attorney collects Good Apple Award

■ **River Oaks'** Richard Mithoff has represented those who have been wronged

By **ARLENE NISSON LASSIN**
CHRONICLE CORRESPONDENT

FIGHTING for justice for those who are disadvantaged or wronged for more than 30 years, attorney Richard Mithoff can now officially be called a good apple.

Mithoff was presented the 2008 J. Chrys Dougherty Good Apple Award at last month's Texas Appleseed's dinner in Austin.

Texas Appleseed, a nonprofit, partners with pro bono attorneys to help clients who cannot otherwise afford legal representation and to solve social justice problems.

"Texas Appleseed is pleased to honor Richard Mithoff's lifetime commitment to justice and his pursuit of diversity and highest standards for the legal profession," said Rebecca Lightsey, executive director.

Mithoff, 62, has been involved with the group for about five years.

"(The award is) quite an honor because it is a great organization that has a very effective impact on those who are traditionally under-represented and most vulnerable," said the River Oaks resident, an attorney who prefers representing individuals, "who are vulnerable and need a voice."

The Mithoff Law Firm, One Allen Center, is now representing relatives of six elderly residents of Brighton Gardens in Bellaire who died in a bus fire while evacuating Hurricane Rita.

"It was a horrific tragedy and I am trying to help," he said. "The families were assured their loved ones were fine and they want to know what happened."



DAVE ROSSMAN: FOR THE CHRONICLE

SEEKING JUSTICE: Attorney Richard Mithoff joined other attorneys in 1998 to help secure a judgment for Harris County in excess of \$2.2 billion against several large tobacco companies.

From the time of his graduation from the University of Texas at Austin Law School in 1971, Mithoff knew that he wanted to represent those who had been wronged.

He began his career as a clerk for U.S. District Judge William Wayne Justice and met veteran attorney Joe Jamail.

Mithoff joined Jamail's law firm in 1974, which eventually became Jamail, Koliou & Mithoff.

During his 12-year stay there, he worked on one of the area's first silicone breast implant cases, as well as others that involved defective medical products or dangerous hospital policies that posed health risks.

In a groundbreaking case against a hospital, he was successful in changing hospital policy and statutory changes in reporting requirements for medical misconduct.

Mithoff began a practice with attorney Tommy Jacks in 1986.

Along with several other

attorneys representing Harris County in 1998, he helped to secure a judgment in excess of \$2.2 billion against several large tobacco companies.

He requested that \$10 million from his own fee for that case be donated to Harris County to fund children's health programs.

Other important cases include a 2002 verdict against Sears for tires sold that were responsible for rollover accidents; and a 2005 settlement for the families of five victims killed in the explosion at the BP plant in Texas City.

He established the Mithoff Law Firm in 2006.

"I enjoy people and I like to hear clients' stories because I learn a lot from them," Mithoff said. "I remember them long after I work with them, and many keep up with me, too, sending me notes with updates."

"Even though I am very fortunate financially, what I value most are the letters and mementos I get from my clients."

RICHARD MITHOFF

■ **Age:** 62

■ **Occupation:** Attorney

■ **Community connection:** River Oaks resident

■ **Fast fact:** He was named the 2006 Trial Lawyer of the Year by the Texas Bar Association.

Visit www.texasappleseed.net for more information about the nonprofit group.

"I keep them out in the war room when I am preparing for trial."

The Lufkin native has been married for 40 years to wife Ginni.

They have two grown children and three grandchildren.

He and his family have supported a number of philanthropic endeavors, including the Children's Museum, and Harris County Hospital District Foundation.

The Mithoffs also have established numerous scholarships for the UT business, law and medical schools.

Richard Mithoff was cited as one of the top 10 trial lawyers in the southwest by the National Law Journal in 1999 and among the nation's top 10 by Forbes magazine in 1989 and 1995.

The Texas Bar Association named him Trial Lawyer of the Year in 2006.

Mithoff and his wife received the Harris County Hospital District's first Ben Taub Humanitarian Award in 2000. Ben Taub General Hospital's trauma center was named in their honor in 2007.

For leisure, Mithoff enjoys mountain climbing. He was inducted into the Explorers Club of New York in 2007.

"I've climbed all over the world, but that was a high point for me," Mithoff said.