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Phone: +1 646 783 7100 | Fax: +1 646 783 7161 | customerservice@law360.com

MVP: Keker's Elliot Peters

By **Emma Cueto**



Law360 (December 9, 2025, 4:03 PM EST) -- Elliot Peters, a partner at San Francisco trial firm Keker Van Nest & Peters LLP, achieved an acquittal for a Palm Springs, California, developer accused of bribery, and guided a former Arnold & Porter Kaye Scholer LLP partner to a favorable result after being sued by Denmark, earning him a spot as one of the 2025 Law360 White Collar MVPs.

His biggest accomplishment:

A former assistant U.S. attorney in the Southern District of New York, Peters had several notable recent cases, including representing former Arnold & Porter partner Michael Ben-Jacob when Denmark accused him of participating in a fraud scheme in a case that settled in late 2024. However, he said that his biggest accomplishment was securing an acquittal in a bribery case against developer John Wessman.

Peters was involved in the case for eight years, from the time Wessman was first charged in 2017 for allegedly participating in a scheme to bribe the mayor of Palm Springs.

The case was challenging for numerous reasons, Peters said, including that it was presided over by what he described as a "difficult judge" and that one of Wessman's former co-defendants eventually accepted a plea deal in exchange for testifying against the developer. Peters was also initially worried that Wessman would not be a good witness on the stand, saying the developer was "a great person, but kind of gruff."

In the end, however, Peters said that Wessman's personality came across as honest and genuine, while Peters was able to show the former co-defendant to be unreliable by revealing that a key detail of his story was impossible.

When the verdict was read out, Peters said, he was relieved to hear the "not guilty" verdicts read one by one, but didn't exhale until the very end.

"It's a very special moment for a defense lawyer when you can deliver a client to the other side of a very

threatening situation like that," he said, "particularly for a guy who's 86. It gave me a lot of joy and professional satisfaction."

His proudest moment:

Though he takes a lot of pride in his work, Peters said, what he's most proud of in his career is that he's "part of a law firm that has a soul."

This year, he said, while many other firms have buckled under pressure from President Donald Trump, Keker has taken public stances against the administration's attacks on lawyers and law firms.

"In this crazy time with law firms knuckling under and tech firms knuckling under to this president and him threatening many things I hold valuable, our firm did not," Peters said.

The firm also values treating its employees well and investing in pro bono work, he added.

"It's really valuable to me to be able to walk the earth as a lawyer and be able to say that I'm part of an organization that stands for the right thing," Peters said.

Peters has been with the firm since 1991 and was added as a name partner in 2016.

His biggest challenge:

Being part of a firm living its values also comes with challenges, Peters said.

"We're trying to operate a different business model [than other firms], but we compete for the same cases and compete for the same clients and compete for the same young lawyers," he said.

Despite the difficulty that sometimes goes along with that, he said, he finds the challenge to be motivating. "There's very few firms trying to do what we're doing," he said.

His advice to junior attorneys:

Peters said his most important advice to younger lawyers is to not lose track of what they enjoy and find meaningful about the law.

"Try to understand how to be good at it, how to be persuasive, how to learn to listen, how to communicate effectively," he said, "but don't lose your heart or lose what's meaningful to you."

What might be most meaningful isn't the same for everyone, Peters said, noting that a lot of attorneys find satisfaction and a sense of purpose in areas of the law that don't interest him as much. However, he said, younger attorneys should focus on finding the work that means something to them over chasing the practice area that pays the best.

"Simply settling for the biggest or most comfortable corporate situation, in my experience, that doesn't necessarily make people happy and satisfied," he said. "You can make a good living being a righteous lawyer and feel good about it, too."

--As told to Emma Cueto. Editing by Melissa Treolo.

Law360's MVPs are attorneys who have distinguished themselves from their peers over the past year through high-stakes litigation, record-breaking deals and complex global matters. A team of Law360 editors selected the 2025 MVP winners after reviewing nearly 900 submissions.

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