

COURTROOM DRAMA

By [Elizabeth Hayes](#) – Staff Reporter, Portland Business Journal
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Jeff Pitzer

Firm: Pitzer Law



Jeff Pitzer, who heads a two-person firm, won a \$65.5 million verdict against PricewaterhouseCoopers on behalf of a family-owned construction company.

Specialty: Commercial, environmental and construction litigation, intellectual property and antitrust

J.D.: University of Wisconsin

Jeff Pitzer, who owns a two-attorney firm in Portland, won the verdict of his career in August, [when a Multnomah County jury awarded his clients \\$65.5 million.](#)

Not only was the amount notable, but so was the party who was found liable for giving negligent tax advice: The Big-Four accounting firm PricewaterhouseCoopers.

“I felt we were proving our case and things were going well, but you never know until the jury returns its verdict,” Pitzer said. “We were fighting for vindication for our clients, who in essence had been accused of doing something wrong, and we did not think they had.”

The trial was the culmination of events occurring 20 years ago that landed Pitzer's clients in hot water with the IRS. In a nutshell, two brothers alleged that PwC gave them bad advice during the sale of their Tualatin construction company. Sadly, John and Richard Marshall, didn't live to see the verdict, but their 80-something-year-old widows Karen and Patsy, did.

Before forming his Portland firm, Pitzer had worked for a 400-lawyer national firm in Chicago, Jenner & Block. A Chicago attorney recruited Pitzer, who specializes in complex business disputes, to handle the Marshalls' lawsuit. Pitzer's partner Peter Grabiell tried the case with him.

"It's a small operation, even though we oftentimes go up against much bigger adversaries than we are," Pitzer said. "Obviously, the law firms we were contending with were some of the best in the country, so it was somewhat daunting, I will concede, but we do that on a fairly regular basis."

Pitzer said he felt confident in the facts of the case.

"I certainly believed in our clients and that they were honest, hardworking people, not the type of people who would set out to violate any laws, much less tax laws, and I believed very strongly that they deserved justice, and that's what we were fighting for in this case," Pitzer said.