

## Rising Star: Mayer Brown's Chris Houpt

By **Evan Weinberger**

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While many litigators shy away from math, Mayer Brown LLP partner Chris Houpt uses his aptitude for the subject to help sway judges in support of his clients, including Bank of New York Mellon Corp. on several occasions, helping land him on Law360's list of top banking attorneys under 40.

This 38-year-old Rising Star, one of three banking attorneys on the list, has been a key member of Mayer Brown's teams in a series of high-profile financial cases, the highest profile of which involved representing BNY Mellon in an \$8.5 billion settlement with Bank of America Corp. over a series of mortgage-backed securities. And he has carved out a very specific role — the numbers guy.

With a background in finance and math — he minored in math at Dartmouth College — Houpt has the ability to work with experts to refine an argument based on the number of defaulted mortgages in a mortgage-backed security or the expected losses that those defaults could mean to investors.

After working with those experts, Houpt is able to break those numbers down into a form that is easily digestible for judges and attorneys.

"Being able to understand something is the first step to being able to explain it to somebody and help them understand it," Houpt said.

That ability, to make a numbers-based case understandable to a judge who may not have a background in math, was key to getting a New York state judge to approve the \$8.5 billion settlement between Bank of America and BNY Mellon, which was representing investors in its role as trustee for a host of MBS issued by Countrywide Financial Corp. Bank of America took over Countrywide in 2008.

Mayer Brown's team recognized a little-used provision in New York law, known as an Article 77 procedure, to settle claims related to more than 530 securitization trusts. As a result of Mayer Brown's



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tactics, Article 77 has become a valuable tool in resolving mortgage-backed securities cases in New York state.

After doing huge amounts of work in discovery and motion practice on the case, Houpt was entrusted with the math portion of Mayer Brown's closing arguments on behalf of BNY Mellon.

In a sign of the trust that Mayer Brown's team had in Houpt, they gave him around 24 hours notice that he would be taking that portion of the closing arguments, said Matthew Ingber, the Mayer Brown partner who led the firm's team.

"He was able to describe complicated issues in a very comprehensible way, and he did it with humor and charm," Ingber said.

Indeed, Houpt said he opened his argument before New York Supreme Court Judge Barbara R. Kapnick with a bit of levity.

"I said, 'Now, your honor, I'm here to talk about math,'" Houpt said. "I think she thought that was funny, because we all knew she was not looking forward to that part of the argument."

Houpt, a graduate of Harvard Law School, also was named partner on the day of the 2013 hearing.

In the end, Judge Kapnick largely approved the \$8.5 billion deal in January 2014.

That was just one notch in Houpt's belt in a legal career that has miles to go, and makes him one of Law360's rising stars for 2015.

--Editing by Mark Lebetkin.