

Westwood Suburban Press

APRIL 10, 1997 • WESTWOOD, MASSACHUSETTS

Taking the law to the people

Local barrister hosts cable legal show

By DAVID HOLTZMAN

Several recent court cases that virtually took over the television screen reminded the public how much lawyers build their careers on the way they speak and carry themselves.

A lawyer can only rise so far if he cannot hold an audience spellbound. William Kickham,

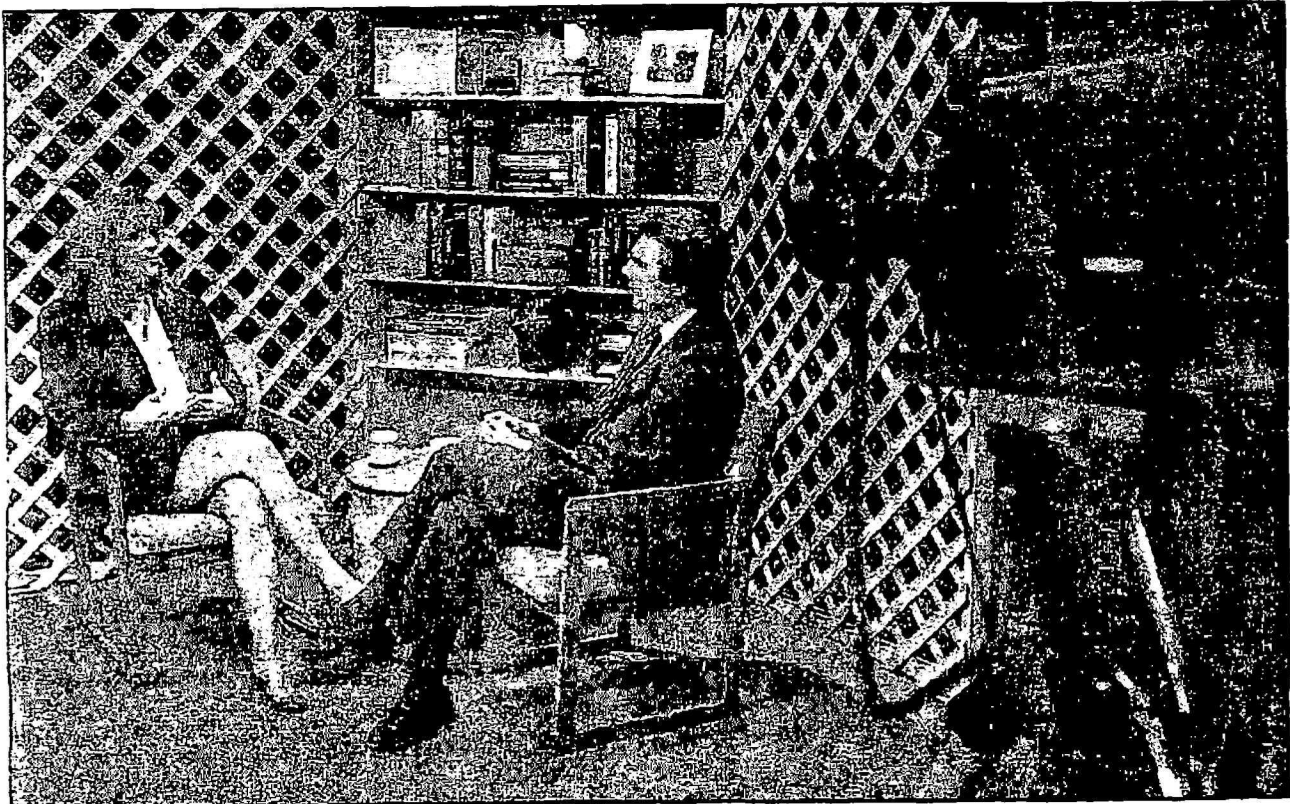
who lives and practices law in Westwood, takes that truth to heart each week as he plans "At the Bar," a show he hosts on local cable Channel 14.

"I was lucky that I was comfortable before the media in a variety of settings," he said after a recent taping of his program. "My training as a lawyer only made me more adept at repre-

senting a client's position in a public forum."

Each edition of "At the Bar" features a guest who has expertise in a particular field of law, addressing an issue familiar to a broad population. At a March 28 taping at the Cablevision studio in Norwood, Kickham interviewed Jane Farrissey, who rep-

Please turn to page 21



Westwood attorney William Kickham interviews his guest Jane Farrissey at a recent taping of his cable TV show 'At the Bar'. (Staff photo by J. Kiely Jr.)

On air with 'At the Bar'

Continued from front page
resents people in trouble with the
Internal Revenue Service.

"You can sit back on the couch, because I know how interested and concerned you are in what we're talking about," said Kickham, welcoming viewers with a cheery voice and smile. He has a smooth style on-camera that draws the audience's attention but also sets the guest at ease.

'Legal information is something people are always trying to find out more about. I had the idea to talk about everyday legal concerns and bring it down to a lay level.'

William Kickham

"You can't be dry," he said later. "You have to be animated and engaged, interesting and interested." He could be talking about speaking before the camera or the jury. "Most lawyers are oral advocates. You don't want to be represented by someone who can't perform."

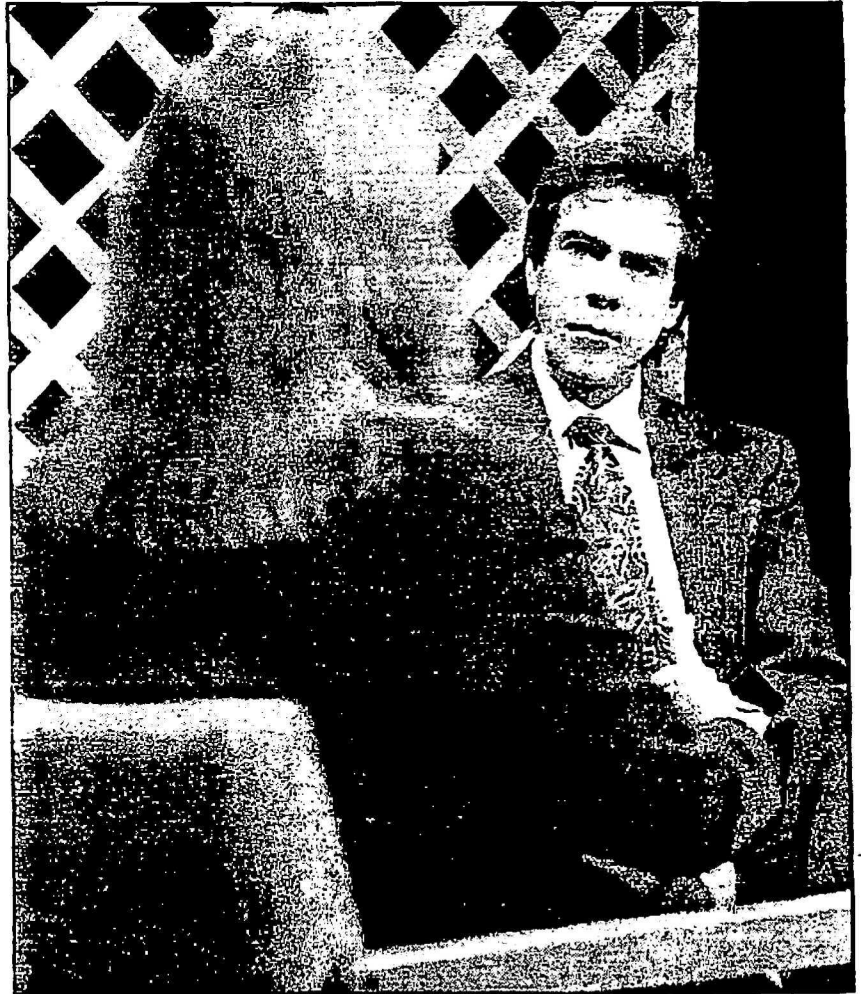
Kickham first tested the glare of the spotlight when he ran for a Town Meeting membership in the political hotbed of Brookline. He did this while still an undergraduate at Boston College.

He attended Suffolk University Law School, but didn't embark on a traditional legal career when he got his degree. Instead, he dived into the sometimes vicious war between trial attorneys and insurance companies. He held a pair of jobs as a media spokesman, first for the lawyers, and then for those who dip into their pockets when the lawyers win.

"I had to go on television and radio and give details on a lot of legal opinions," he said. "We dealt with a lot of how trials are conducted, the conditions of courthouses, and tort reform."

The last of these is what has instigated the lawyers' and insurers' battle.

"If you tripped over a cable and broke your back, I would sue on your behalf," he said. "If I got a jury verdict, the insurer would pay for it. So if I sue, I'm really suing the insurer."



William Kickham one on one during the taping of his cable show. (Staff photo by J. Kiely Jr.)

Lawyers are not necessarily guilty of pillaging insurers for their clients' monetary gain, said Kickham. He sees his job as finding justice that can heal pain, or at least trying to.

"I like liability law, when someone has been injured in an accident, maybe on the job," he said. "Everyone complains about people who sue at the drop of a hat, until they get hurt. It's very rewarding, a positive event, to right a wrong the client is a victim of."

That interest in helping ordinary people gave Kickham the idea to start his own television show. He knew he could handle the public eye, and wanted to make the intricacies of the law more accessible to the masses.

He had little trouble convincing the local cable affiliate he could put on a quality show. It has aired frequently in Westwood and Norwood the past two years.

"Legal information is something people are always trying to find out more about," he said. "I had the idea to talk about everyday legal concerns and bring it down to a lay level."

Kickham talks to guests about issues that affect both individuals and businesses, lawyers and their

clients. On the show about tax troubles, Farrissey explained how people forget to keep a good paper trail recording their expenses. Then, they are audited by the IRS, and don't have the documents to cover themselves.

"What happens when someone gets that letter (from the IRS)?" asked Kickham. Farrissey said it can be pretty frightening, but she also said there are ways to solve the problem without going to court. "You never want them coming to your office," she said.

Shows like this have attracted a following for Kickham.

"I bump into people in the supermarket," he said. "They say, 'I liked that show and learned a lot from it.' That's nice to hear."

Kickham doesn't limit his work to local cable TV and ordinary citizens, however. Half of his work is still as a media contact. For instance, he speaks before legislators, regulators and the press for the fitness industry.

The lawyer seems at home in the niche he has carved as a people's advocate and a public figure of sorts. He doesn't deny his is a crowded field. But it's one for which the need will never end.