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One client learns worth of lawyers

New York police officer Manny Del Valle never liked lawyers. But Charlotte attorney Gary Jackson changed his mind.

As a detective investigating fraud cases, Valle was used to defense lawyers picking apart his cases during trial.

But then his son died on Sept. 11, 2001. A firefighter, Manny Jr. had been off duty when the call came about the World Trade Center attacks. The young firefighter grabbed two oxygen tanks and jumped into the firetruck. His body was found near the entryway of Tower 1.

A call had gone out nationwide for lawyers to work with families to help them navigate the maze of paperwork and legal issues surrounding the victim's compensation fund. Jackson saw it as a chance to improve his profession's image.

He helped Del Valle figure out what his son's life was worth by researching his good health, smarts, education and potential earnings.

"Part of the case here was a young man who was a star in the fire department who would be at the top," said Jackson, who estimates he worked 700 hours on the case.

Ultimately, Jackson helped the Del Valle family receive roughly \$1.7 million from the victim's fund. Del Valle said he would have received about \$600,000 without Jackson's help.

Jackson said he didn't receive any fees and paid for his own travel to New York.

"I've never liked lawyers -- before you," said Del Valle, who regularly swings by Charlotte to visit with Jackson when he takes vacations in Florida.

"I was totally lost mentally," he said during a visit to Jackson's Charlotte office in December 2004. "I needed guidance."

Kerry Hall