



## *Richard Krukar, JD 2004 Patent Attorney*

In the late 1990s, Richard Krukar, a research and development engineer, headed up a software group for a company that built equipment used in making computer chips. He had flirted with the idea of taking the bar exam but never considered going to a traditional law school because three years of law school didn't appear nearly as fun as being an engineer. The 1990s were particularly good years for engineers because the Internet was going mainstream.

He recalls: "One of the things that emerged during the Internet boom was this bold little law school called Concord. It offered a four year program leading to a J.D. and the right to sit for the California bar exam. Best of all, work travel and the occasional eighty-hour work week wouldn't interfere." Duly impressed, Richard enrolled with the intent of being an engineer who was also a lawyer, thus enhancing his career.

Richard didn't expect the program to be as rigorous as it was. "I thought it would be easy. Lawyers sounded stupid to my engineer ears so I figured there couldn't be much challenge to passing the bar - wrong! It turns out I just didn't understand their questions." After four years of course work while also working as an engineer, he graduated Concord and passed the California bar exam.

A lot happened during that four year program. The dot-com bust hit and Richard believed his company was becoming less viable. He started thinking about a new career focus. It looked smarter to be a lawyer who was also an engineer. "It was natural for a PhD engineer to move into patent law," he said. With advice and encouragement from the Concord faculty, he took and passed the patent bar exam.

At times, juggling those long work weeks with law school was intense,

but there was ample motivation. "Concord's California Bar pass rate really encouraged me to stick with it. I could see that a whole lot of Concord students were passing the exam the first time through." Looking back, he was also impressed by Concord's community. "Every one of us had a life outside of law school but was similarly driven to work through the program."

Today, Richard works as a patent attorney and practices before the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office (USPTO) and the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) where he files and prosecutes patent applications. He's also played a variety of roles in patent litigation. Some of the most interesting roles call on his entire back ground. "I've been in a number of situations where the expert witnesses and the lawyers are talking at instead of with one another. People get tense. That's when I step in as an interpreter." He also notes that talking engineer-to-engineer with inventors is a big advantage.

"I use my Concord education every day now. It's amazing how a legal education changes your world view. It's changed how I approach other people. A lawyer has to craft messages for the audience, whether the audience is a client, judge, or jury. I've really taken to heart that the message received matters more than the message sent. Before Concord, I'd usually talk louder, browbeat, or lecture to try to get my point across."

Does having a legal education make you a better person? Lawyer jokes aside, Richard admits that "It seems easier for a lawyer to help individual people than for an engineer. A couple of words don't take much time and don't generate billable hours, but they can make a big difference for someone."

"Another effect is that people at parties are more interested in lawsuits than in factory automation or the quantum interactions between photons and nanostructures." Richard admits he also dresses better than he did as an engineer. When not working, he's spending more time these days socializing, exercising, and engaging in his hobbies of dog training, Japanese martial arts, and sailing.