

ARIZONA'S BEST LAWYERS

BY JOE KULLMAN

Attorneys judge their colleagues

Larry Debus

Debus, Bradford & Kazan —
Phoenix

An engaging personality who says "you have to understand that a courtroom is a theatre," Debus has been accused of using his sly acting ability to sway a jury. Whatever his method, he's won some impressive verdicts in several of the most recent highly publicized and difficult murder, drug and business fraud cases. "You can't be weak of heart to do this," he says. "Within the parameters of the law and ethics, you have to be willing to do everything it takes to stand up and fight." Fellow attorneys point to his deceptive skill at debating sticky issues during trial. Says one: "He's like a cat."

At last count, according to the state bar association, there were 8,556 lawyers in active practice in Arizona. That's approaching almost *double* the number of attorneys listed in a bar census of just 10 years ago. There are a few simple things you can say about Arizona lawyers: Most of them are men and most of them work in or near Phoenix. Specifically, just short of 5,000 lawyers maintain offices in Maricopa County. The most significant change in the profile of the Arizona legal community, however, has been the emergence of women in the profession. There are 1,357 women attorneys listed in the recent bar report, up six times from 225 in 1975.

That's the easy part, sticking to the numbers. But once you move from talking about quantity to discussing quality — asking "Who's the best?" — the things get a little more complex.

How do you approach a survey attempting to reveal who's the best when the results will obviously not mention literally thousands of attorneys, many who are probably competent, hard working, highly skilled or may even possess a certain amount of legal genius?

For one thing, you don't take the rap yourself. Not when there are lawyers involved. What you do is cover yourself. You go to the source.

So, admittedly, the conclusions here are based on "hearsay" evidence. *Arizona Living* did the heavy lifting. Attorneys — dozens of them throughout the state — did the saying. Asked to name colleagues in private practice whom they consider "outstanding," "exceptional," "all-stars," "first-rate," "up to the