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From the Orlando Business Journal:

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## Meet the eminent domain lawyer fighting FDOT and others for fair land acquisitions

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As major roadway projects such as the I-4 Beyond the Ultimate project look for more land due to the revamp of Interstate 4, it means businesses may have to give up their property — and this is when Prineet Sharma steps in.

Sharma, 46, is an accomplished trial attorney with Sharma Eminent Domain Lawyers who has been practicing in Orlando for more than 20 years.

In eminent domain cases, which is what he specializes in, the government entity is expected to compensate the business or person being affected, including paying for attorney fees or consultant costs, a payment typically based on the property's fair market value. However, adjacent or remaining property values can be impacted negatively by roadway construction, as well.

Several of Sharma's clients are being affected by the taking of the Crossroads of Lake Buena Vista, a plaza across the street from Walt Disney World on State Road 535, that may be demolished thanks to more Interstate 4 road projects following the \$2.3 billion I-4 Ultimate project, which will be completed in 2021.

Sharma represents an Indian restaurant in the plaza as well as the 196-room Radisson Hotel, which is adjacent Crossroads on Apopka Vineland Road, and said FDOT may take a huge portion of that parking lot of that hotel.

Here, in a one-on-one interview with *Orlando Business Journal*, Sharma shares more about his background and what inspired him to be a lawyer:

**Tell us about your upbringing?** I grew up in Longwood and attended high school there. My dad was an engineer at Lockheed Martin for 27 years and my mom was an accountant. My parents and older brother, who's an oral surgeon in North Carolina, were born in India. I was actually the first of my family born in the U.S. I had hard-working parents who wanted to give their kids an opportunity to succeed here.

**What are some experiences that helped you get where you are today?** In seventh grade, I read "To Kill a Mockingbird" and I admired Atticus Finch. That was the driving force for me to be a lawyer early on. I even wrote a report on it and it was the first A I got in English.

**Talk about the biggest case you are working on:** It's about a 400-acre acquisition to build a highway in northeastern Florida, so there's a whole host of land-planning issues. The owner I'm representing has 20,000 acres. You're solving an eminent domain case, but you're talking about something that will have 20-30 years of impact. It totally transforms what



SHARMA EMINENT DOMAIN LAWYERS

Prineet Sharma of Sharma Eminent Domain Lawyers

has been historically agriculture to a large, mixed-use development. It's going to be similar to how Interstate 4 is now and what it used to be. To be on the forefront of that, it's exciting.

**What are some things most people don't know about you?**

I have an 8-year-old daughter, so I spend a lot of time playing princesses with her.

I like to fish a lot and be outdoors. I have fished in Costa Rica and I just got back from fishing on the islands off of the Bahamas — that was remote and pretty neat. With fishing, it's more about hanging out with good friends and being disconnected from electronic devices.

I was president of Kappa Alpha Order, which surprises a lot of people because it's more of southern-based fraternity. It was one of the more rewarding experiences in my life. Many of those fraternity brothers are still friends. From a leadership standpoint, a lot of things you dealt with as president such as your integrity and honesty, you carry on.

My wife and I have a scholarship fund for veterans in the Stetson College of Law and the University of Florida Athletic Association Inc. I never served in the armed forces, but I know people who have and respect them.

**What do you see as your biggest success in your personal life?** It's such a cheesy thing to say, but it would be getting my wife agree to marry me.

**What has been your biggest success as a lawyer?** I've had opportunities to resolve some cases in the \$20 million range and I was lucky enough to have done that earlier on in my career. In the last six months, I settled about \$40 million in cases. Those are big cases for what I do. The cool thing about what I do is when the government makes an offer to buy property and I can get an increase. Although I've had large achievements, those people who got two times what the government has offered, it makes a real impact to those people's lives. If that was your home or business, that check is the only thing you can get out of the process. It's your livelihood at stake. I've completed a lot of cases and people have been so appreciative of the work we have done. My personal philosophy is that I add value for my clients. If you do that with everyone you come into contact with, those small matters turn into big referrals and genuine appreciation. Getting compensated is important, but to get that appreciation from clients is so rewarding.

**Who has been your greatest mentor?** He's one of my competitors now, I had the fortune of working with him and he's one of the most respected eminent domain lawyers in the country. We were part of a big state law firm and worked as partners. The opportunity I had working with him provided me the chance to apply those learned skill sets in what I do today. From a true mentorship standpoint, I would say my mentor has been my dad, the best man at my wedding. He has the highest level of respect from his peers. I always told myself if I could meet his standard, I have made an accomplishment.

**What are your pet peeves?** Arrogant people, people who are full of themselves and not genuine

**What are the biggest misconceptions about eminent domain lawyers?** Most people don't understand they can hire an attorney at no cost to themselves. There's no cost, no risk. If I get an increase in what the government is offering, by state law, they have to pay me a percentage of that increase. We don't get any attorney fees, it doesn't come out of the client's money. We've seen where people settle with the government not knowing what they are fully entitled to. With eminent domain, you only have one chance to resolve your case.

**Prineet Sharma**

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