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Gibbons, Del Deo: A New Jersey Firm's Move Into New York And Beyond

The Editor interviews Patrick C. Dunican, Jr., Managing Director, Gibbons, Del Deo, Dolan, Griffinger & Vecchione, P.C.

Editor: Mr. Dunican, will you give our readers something of your background and experience?

Dunican: I graduated from Seton Hall Law School in 1991, where I was Editor-In-Chief of the *Law Review*. Following a Federal Clerkship for Judge Clarkson Fisher, I joined Gibbons, Del Deo in 1992. Five years later, the firm asked me to open an office in New York. After I became a Director in the firm, I was named the Administrative Director of the New York office, which now comprises nearly 40 lawyers. I became Managing Director of the firm in January of this year and returned to our Newark, New Jersey office.

Editor: Please describe the firm's history. How has it evolved into one of New Jersey's preeminent law firms?

Dunican: The firm was founded in 1926 by Andrew Crummy, the dean of the bankruptcy bar in New Jersey. In time, the firm grew and came to have a reputation for its litigation expertise, due largely to the presence of John Gibbons. In 1970, John left the firm to become a Judge on the Third Circuit Court of Appeals, but the foundations for success – by way of founders such as Ralph Del Deo, Chuck Dolan, Mike Griffinger and Frank Vecchione, in addition to Andrew Crummy – had been laid. When John Gibbons returned to the firm in 1990, Gibbons, Del Deo was one of the leading firms in New Jersey. His arrival along with the leadership of David Sheehan, our then Managing Director who now has assumed the role of Chairman, then propelled the firm to the next level, which involved regional status and, indeed, national status in some areas. I would add that the culture of the firm has evolved in tandem with its expertise. Those of us who have had the privilege of working here have been very fortunate, both in terms of the quality of work and the quality of our colleagues.

Editor: And the firm's practice? Please tell us what practice areas Gibbons, Del Deo is most noted for.



Patrick C. Dunican, Jr.

Dunican: We continue to be a preeminent litigation firm, with a number of specialized litigation areas, such as medical device litigation and a sophisticated business and commercial litigation practice. In addition, we have built up a signature practice in the intellectual property area, and we continue to expand an already solid corporate department. The arrival of a new Director, Frank Cannone from a prestigious New York law firm, to head that department on April 1 enhances the sophisticated services the firm already provides in the corporate area.

Editor: Would you tell us about your own practice?

Dunican: I am a litigator, and my particular expertise involves complex federal litigation, including shareholder disputes and restrictive covenant and trade secret cases.

Editor: You were the head of the firm's New York office for six years. Will you tell us about the decision to open an office in New York?

Dunican: In the mid-90s we realized that the historical relationship between Gibbons, Del Deo and many of the large New York firms had changed. Up until that point, we served as local counsel in New Jersey for many of the New York firms. During the 90s, the New York firms began to open offices in New Jersey. We once thought that opening an office in New York would have an adverse effect on referrals from New York. However, the arrival of the New York firms in New Jersey obviated that concern. We knew it was time for us to have a presence in New York, and we believed we had the advantage of being able to offer our clients services at the very highest level of quality but with more competitive pricing than the New York firms. In addition, we felt that a New York address was important in attracting clients of national and international caliber.

Editor: Has that original assessment proved accurate?

Dunican: There is no question about it. The New York office has grown to nearly 40 lawyers, accomplished by providing excellent services that are more price competitive than what might be termed the New York standard but at the very highest level of quality.

Editor: What were the challenges that you faced as head of the operation in New York?

Dunican: The office began as very much a satellite operation of the New Jersey firm. I practiced alone for a time, and then another associate joined me from the New Jersey office, followed by a new lateral partner. At first it was difficult under these circumstances to attract the caliber of associate we wanted for the office. In time, however, as we gained momentum and a reputation in New York for good work, the quality of the resumes improved. That, of course, added to the momentum and we became an established presence.

Editor: Does the New York office have a mission that differs from that of your head office in Newark?

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Dunican: No, and I think the reason that Gibbons selected me to open the New York office was to ensure that someone who knew the culture and character of the firm would infuse that culture and character into the new operation. That is, the firm did *not* want an office with a separate and distinct mission, but rather one that was fully integrated, both in terms of its personality and its work, with the main office.

Editor: On January 1st of this year you were appointed the youngest Managing Director in Gibbons, Del Deo's 80-year history. I am certain that you have some very clear ideas of what the firm can become. Would you share your vision for the firm with our readers?

Dunican: My vision is the shared vision of all of our Directors at Gibbons, Del Deo; that is to maintain our status as a preeminent regional law firm, which entails continuing to provide services of the very finest quality at competitive rates, with absolute efficiency and a dedication to client service. We believe that the firm will continue to grow and to prosper with these guideposts.

Editor: What about the challenges? Given the firm's location, you must face significant competition from the leading firms in New York and Philadelphia. Please tell us about this.

Dunican: There is no doubt that the challenges all law firms face are substantial. We do not believe that we must become a thousand-lawyer law firm in order to survive, but we do recognize that we must grow. Remaining static is not a possibility. We have been working in this direction in the area of intellectual property; for example, the firm's growing department and reputation has served to open the door for us to clients who might not otherwise have thought of us. Similarly, the arrival of Frank Cannone to head our corporate practice enables us to compete with the national law firms in a wide array of practice specialties within the corporate area. These developments are in addition to a strong foundation in business and commercial

litigation, products liability litigation and medical device litigation.

Editor: What about growth in numbers? Do you anticipate the firm growing organically — by hiring ever larger numbers of law school graduates — or do you expect to do it by acquisition and merger?

Dunican: We have grown in a variety of ways. We have added lateral partners, and we continue to look for opportunities for that type of growth, both in New York and New Jersey. In 2002, we undertook a merger that added the skills of an intellectual property boutique, Cobrin & Gittes, to our ranks. The addition of eight IP lawyers was significant to our New York practice and, in addition, served to enhance the services the firm offers to a very great degree. In 2003, we eliminated the summer associate program. Our thinking was to attract federal law clerks and high-level state law clerks by paying our associates more in salary and bonuses. The returns are not in as yet, but to date we appear to be attracting the quality of associate — both law clerks and associates from some of the larger firms — that we have targeted.

Editor: I would be very interested to see whether other firms are following Gibbons, Del Deo's lead with respect to summer associate programs.

Dunican: Our approach is a unique experiment. To be sure, there are those who have indicated that eliminating our summer associate program was not a good idea from a public relations perspective; however, this move has enabled us to pay associates more, so I am confident that any negative image that results will be offset by the positive realities of the marketplace.

Editor: On the question of recruiting, how does Gibbons, Del Deo differentiate itself from other firms?

Dunican: One of the best things we have to sell is

the firm's culture. Within the firm we have a very positive attitude toward each other, and others outside the firm, including clients, are aware of it. This reputation helps in our recruiting efforts, both at law schools and in terms of lateral hiring. In addition, our pro bono activities — a very strong part of the firm's culture — constitute a wonderful platform from which to recruit young attorneys. The firm supports a unique program, the John J. Gibbons Fellowship in Public Interest and Constitutional Law, which entails pro bono work on issues of public interest and national significance. The program was established more than ten years ago in Judge Gibbons' name, and, as it happens, the firm is currently challenging the government's detention of prisoners at Guantanamo Bay. Judge Gibbons argued the case before the United States Supreme Court in April. There are four Gibbons Fellows who are full-time lawyers engaged in public interest matters. Needless to say, this program has served to attract a great deal of attention and some very fine young lawyers to the firm.

Editor: What about additional offices? Do you expect to open another office after New York?

Dunican: The firm has a third office in Trenton, engaged in lobbying and legislative activities with three attorneys. Although it has been open for only two years, it has proven to be a successful investment. In addition, the question of a Washington, DC office is under discussion.

Editor: Gibbons, Del Deo is now one of the leading firms in New Jersey. Where would you like it to be when you turn over your Managing Director mantle to someone else?

Dunican: I have two priorities. First, I would like to maintain the wonderful culture for which Gibbons, Del Deo is celebrated. Second, I would like to increase the overall profitability of the firm. These are not mutually exclusive priorities; rather they can reinforce each other. Achieving the right balance between them is what I would like to accomplish during my time as Managing Director.

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