

# The Metropolitan Corporate Counsel

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## Gibbons Celebrates 85 Years

*In 2011, Gibbons P.C. is celebrating its 85th anniversary. This is an extraordinary achievement for any business and particularly notable in the practice of law. While many firms fade into history after their founders depart, or when transition to a next generation proves too difficult to accomplish, Gibbons has not just survived for close to nine decades but flourished. We discussed with Patrick C. Dunican Jr., the firm's Chairman and Managing Director, some of the many reasons Gibbons reached this milestone.*

**Editor: Does Gibbons have an overall vision and strategy that have propelled the firm's ongoing success?**

**Dunican:** Yes, I think we stand out among competitors by staying true to a middle-market vision. Our business model is focused on offering high-quality, cost-effective middle-market legal services to Fortune 500 clients and middle-market businesses; that is, we handle major matters for mid-market companies (with annual revenues of \$100 million to \$2.5 billion) and mid-market matters for major companies, notably in the Mid-Atlantic region. We have received very positive recognition for this vision; for example, the *National Law Journal's* inaugural "Midsize Hot List" included Gibbons among 20 midsize firms nationwide.

**Editor: What would you say is the foundation for your success?**

**Dunican:** The use of the word "foundation" is appropriate, because we consciously built a firm-wide infrastructure to support exceptional legal and client service. Our regional network of offices is one example. With headquarters in Newark, New Jersey, and thriving offices

in New York, Philadelphia, Trenton, and Delaware, Gibbons has a significant foothold in the Mid-Atlantic and a presence that lends itself to exceptional regional coverage. With up-to-the-minute video, audio, and network technology linking all five offices, we can close major deals and devise litigation strategies for matters that involve Gibbons attorneys across several firm offices and client representatives throughout a number of their own locations – as if we were all in the same room.

**Editor: Explain how your lawyers inspire the loyalty of such an exceptional client base.**

**Dunican:** Practice innovation is standard operating procedure for our brilliant and hardworking lawyers. Gibbons takes pride in being entrepreneurial and nimble by anticipating clients' needs and creating practice niches to address them. These forward-thinking enhancements to the services we offer – building on a solid foundation of existing legal practice areas – introduce new, interdisciplinary practices that tackle up-to-the-minute client concerns in response to the most current business, economic, legislative, and judicial developments. To keep on top of these developments, the Gibbons Knowledge Management team uses our kmAlerts System, which is automated and incurs no cost to clients, to actively monitor news, case law, business and legal issues, industries, and docket events. This allows our attorneys to proactively inform clients of important developments that



**Patrick C.  
Dunican Jr.**

affect them and to adapt the firm's practice in response.

Just a few of the concentrations we have developed or expanded recently in response to market conditions and economic and industry trends include Renewable Energy, Cross-Border Transactions, Health Care Reform, Consumer Class Actions, Reinsurance, E-Discovery, Media Law, and Government Affairs, among others that supplement our renowned, longstanding practice.

Moreover, client service goes hand in hand with legal service at Gibbons. We have implemented numerous accessibility standards, such as a return message policy that we monitor through client feedback, which requires our attorneys to respond to any client email or phone call within two hours. All attorneys and staff have remote access to the firm's network, allowing them access to all the firm's technology resources, regardless of where they may be. They are also provided with BlackBerry wireless devices to ensure instant and continuous client communications around the world. The firm's unified communications platform also provides "find me, follow me" functionality, enabling attorneys' mobile devices to ring when their office phones ring, in the event they are not at their desks for client calls.

Our practice area blogs are online resources designed to provide practical perspectives, analysis, and discussion on developing legal and business news, focusing on the most pressing issues impacting business today. Gibbons also publishes practice-specific electronic client newsletters, ranging from immediate-turnaround updates alerting clients to key legislative, judicial, or marketplace developments, to more comprehensive legal analyses of critical issues and legal decisions, and we have extended Gibbons

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Academy presentations to include clients and alumni, at no cost to them, for CLE credits.

The staffing needs of our clients are paramount, and we do whatever is necessary to fulfill them. Gibbons has participated in various secondment programs for clients, which have included providing lawyers and paralegals to numerous companies, to work on the clients' premises for a variety of timeframes ranging from one month to several years. We also recognize that quality representation and a financially sound relationship go hand in hand. We are open to implementing custom, mutually beneficial alternative fee arrangements for key clients.

**Editor: How do you ensure that your attorneys and staff maintain this standard of service?**

**Duncan:** There are several ways we make sure that the best possible workforce staffs our clients' critical matters. For example, the firm has long been committed to the Gibbons Diversity Initiative (GDI), but a recent, important effort has been to refine GDI to address the disproportionate impact of the current economy and law firm layoffs on diverse attorney retention rates. In addition, we heavily promote the careers of talented women. Gibbons was named among the 2009 winners of the prestigious, international Catalyst Award, one of the preeminent corporate honors recognizing outstanding achievement in the advancement of women in the workplace, and is one of only 14 firms nationwide included on *Working Mother* magazine's list of "Best Law Firms for Women" for each of the three years it has been published.

The firm's initiative to recruit judicial law clerks and other experienced attorneys, rather than to run a summer program or hire students and attorneys directly out of law school, delivers clients immeasurable benefits and tremendous value, through our strong relationships with employees of federal and state agencies, and our firsthand insight about individual judges, which helps us tailor our approach and more accurately direct strategies.

We also believe it is paramount for attorneys to continue their education while practicing law. Formal training is provided through Gibbons Academy, which I mentioned earlier. In addition, Gibbons provides various mentoring plat-

forms. In many cases, young attorneys are paired with "legal legends," including our retired judges, and they are trusted to work on sophisticated matters with high-level directors. The firm also offers a unique Apprentice Program, designed to maximize the value of our services while providing a solid training ground for new attorneys. It exposes recent law school graduates to the responsibilities of junior associates and trains them in a "real world" firm environment. With close supervision, they also "shadow" attorneys throughout their assigned practice groups, at the firm, in court, and, when appropriate, at client meetings. Clients are not billed for apprentice training time.

To attract high-caliber employees and to encourage productivity and loyalty, we have to be an exceptional employer, committed to our employees' professional development, positive workplace environment, and work/life balance – which in turn makes us a stronger, more effective, more dedicated law firm to our clients. The firm recruits and retains a top-tier workforce through such initiatives as the Gibbons Experience, our unique and generous benefits program. Largely due to the Gibbons Experience, Gibbons is regularly ranked one of the "Best Places to Work in New Jersey" in an annual list compiled by *NJBIZ*. Similarly, for two years in a row, Gibbons was the highest ranked New Jersey-headquartered firm on *American Lawyer's* survey of midlevel associate satisfaction.

To ensure continuity of service, which is critical to the successful management of client matters, we heartily encourage extended employment at Gibbons, and several Gibbons Experience benefits recognize longtime employees, including the "Anniversary Day Off" and "20+ Club." Employees are also encouraged to remain at Gibbons throughout various stages of their personal lives, including after having children. The firm offers flex-time schedules on both full- and part-time bases, as well as traditional part-time schedules, which do not affect individuals' prospects for promotion. Gibbons also maintains nursing rooms for new mothers and an emergency childcare program.

**Editor: A regional presence, supportive infrastructure, practice innovation, value-added services, top-tier workforce – is there anything else that Gibbons does for clients that keeps them coming back?**

**Duncan:** When clients know we share their values, we make those extra connections that bond us above and beyond the individual matters we handle for them. We share their professional values through involvement in industry organizations that support and promote them and through leadership in bar associations and practice sections devoted to areas critical to their businesses. Clients reap tangible benefits as a result. We better understand trends, and we meet communities of executives who regularly deal with the very issues our clients face.

We are also proud to share our clients' civic values. We support many of the signature institutions in our communities, particularly Newark, through extensive involvement in such organizations as the New Jersey Performing Arts Center, New Jersey Symphony Orchestra, Christ the King School, and Seton Hall University School of Law, through our establishment of the Gibbons Institute of Law, Science and Technology.

Our legacy of excellence in outreach is even broader in scope. Through the nationally renowned, highly honored John J. Gibbons Fellowship in Public Interest & Constitutional Law, two full-time firm attorneys handle, on a pro bono basis, matters of cutting-edge legal importance and broad significance. Our traditional pro bono program, meanwhile, focuses on matters involving youth and education; local community revitalization; homeless assistance; military families in need; and prisoners reentering society. Gibbons has long been recognized by the *New Jersey Law Journal* as having one of the top pro bono programs in the state, and *American Lawyer's* "Pro Bono Scorecard" ranked our program higher than those of 90 larger AmLaw 200 firms. We also received the New Jersey Business & Industry Association's 2010 "Excellence in Public Service" Award and a previous *NJBIZ* "Corporate Citizen of the Year" recognition.

**Editor: Where do you see Gibbons 85 years from now?**

**Duncan:** We have managed for the first 85 years to adapt, evolve, and grow, without ever abandoning our core identity and firmly held principles. I cannot imagine that will change over the next 85 years.