



WHO TO WATCH IN... LAW

Northeast Ohio's legal community is full of bright minds and interesting stories. In this section, we offer a cross section of just some of those who are making their mark in

Northeast Ohio's legal community and positioning themselves as leaders.

We also ask others working within the field to weigh in on challenges facing the sector in the future.

KEVIN BROKAW

Director of development/general counsel
Geis Cos.

At Geis Cos., the Streetsboro-based real estate developer and industrial contractor, Kevin Brokaw recently was promoted to development director but continues to fulfill the duties of his prior job as general counsel.

Greg Geis, one of two brothers who own the concern, said the promotion reflects how Mr. Brokaw has grown in three years at the company and earned added responsibility.

"He's an integral part of the management team," Mr. Geis said. The job playing the role of business adviser as well as legal counsel fulfills a lifelong goal for Mr. Brokaw, who said he always has sought to aid his clients' business interests as well as look out for their legal and financial interests.

Mr. Brokaw joined the company in 2009 as it began pursuing urban projects such as the MidTown Technology Park on Cleveland's East Side.

This year the firm launched the remaking of the former Ameritrust skyscraper and associated buildings in downtown Cleveland as an office, apartment and hotel project that incorporates construction of the new central headquarters for Cuyahoga County.

Those projects dramatically heightened the family-owned concern's profile and built on decades of experience creating suburban industrial parks and build-to-suit properties.

At Geis, Mr. Brokaw assists the firm's varied professionals, from those in architecture to construction, in every aspect of the development process, including site selection, closing, preparing financial estimates and getting the jobs going.

He also works with the city, county and state



governments that provide alternative financing that is crucial to urban development projects.

Mr. Brokaw's path to Geis, which led through working for other developers and two law firms, surfaced when he and Fred Geis, the other brother who owns the company, struck up an acquaintance at a conference both attended. Fred Geis thought Mr. Brokaw, at the time real estate director for the Akron Metropolitan Housing Authority, would be a good fit for the aggressive company.

Jack Waldeck, chairman of the real estate unit at law firm Walter Haverfield, does work for Geis Cos. and sees Mr. Brokaw as perfect for the company, and that goes beyond the nuts and bolts of legal issues.

"He has a high energy level," Mr. Waldeck said. "The Geis brothers work at all hours, day and night, when deals are happening. He can respond and keep pace with (them)."

Mr. Brokaw positioned himself for the type of job he is in now way back at the Cleveland-Marshall College of Law at Cleveland State University, where he completed its program combining a law degree and master's degree in business administration. He said he went that route because his father, Glenn Brokaw, was general counsel for several Northeast Ohio real estate developers and practiced real estate law.

The younger Mr. Brokaw grew up in Independence hearing law and real estate stories at home. Today he lives in Brecksville with his wife Sarah and their two children, ages 5 and 8, and is as engaged as possible in his children's activities.

"As a family-owned company, Geis is very supportive of that," Mr. Brokaw said. "They encourage you to do well in their professional life and personal life."

— Stan Bullard

WHAT THE LEGAL COMMUNITY IS SAYING

GEORGE S. COAKLEY

Partner
Reminger Co. LPA

■ **What types of attributes will be needed in tomorrow's legal sector leaders?**

I think the same attributes that define the legal leaders today and in the past will inform future leaders: integrity, creative thinking, good listening, writing and verbal presentation skills, ability to maintain a balanced lifestyle, fair, considerate, consistent and good sense of humor.



■ **What are some of the most significant challenges in the legal field going forward?**

One of the most significant challenges is how to integrate the rapidly developing technological advances into the basic mission of solving the client's problem quickly and cost-effectively. Another continuing challenge will be attracting and retaining talent and dealing with the mounting debt accumulated by young lawyers from college and law school tuitions.

DONALD P. FISCHBACH

Partner
Calfee, Halter & Griswold LLP

■ **What types of attributes will be needed in tomorrow's legal sector leaders?**

Nothing will replace competence, integrity and professionalism as the standards by which legal leaders are judged. In the future, leaders will be challenged increasingly to be creative and strategic thinkers for their clients and assist their clients to be more and more proactive. Attorneys flexible and able to deploy focused skill sets to matters, whether new or old, will be in demand.



■ **What are some of the most significant challenges in the legal field going forward?**

With corporate and in-house counsel facing increasing pressure to hold down costs and proactively manage legal issues, and individuals able to access perceived information online, it becomes even more vital that attorneys are will-

ing to look outside traditional approaches to client collaboration. We must be creative, quick to respond and focused on making client service the most important priority. Law firms must offer clients a holistic approach, with multiple practice areas able to work together to quickly solve, minimize or head off a potential problem.

JOHN R. LIBER II

Principal
Thrasher, Dinsmore & Dolan

■ **What types of attributes will be needed in tomorrow's legal sector leaders?**

Flexibility, creativity and vision. As the legal profession evolves, I have seen that those who rise to the top are not only ambitious, but willing and able to break from the norm and come up with creative solutions for the complex issues that arise. After all, as attorneys we are the problem solvers for our clients' legal challenges. Most of the time, the answer is not black or white. It often requires the individual professional to craft a solution that is not only accurate, but compatible with the clients' current and ongoing needs.



■ **What are some of the most significant challenges in the legal field going forward?**

Without question it is financial. At all levels the legal profession is experiencing the beginnings of an unprecedented financial challenge. In the public sector, as governments seek ways to solve their own budget problems, resources for legal programs, judicial salaries and funding for public attorney services are targeted. Financing for student loans for law schools has reached the crisis point. And in the private sector, the competition over fees and the contraction of law firms and private practices continues. The job market has shrunk, leaving many law school graduates unemployed with large student loan debt.

This is why when asked by students contemplating a legal career, I often recommend they take a break between college and graduate school so they gain greater perspective and unique experiences to utilize in their career, and take the extra time and seek a dual degree to broaden their career opportunities.

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