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LAW FIRM LEADERS WITH JOSEPH M. GAGLIARDO

Leader stresses client service

Gagliardo tries making himself readily available to those inside, outside the firm

BY JOHN FLYNN ROONEY
Law Bulletin staff writer

While growing up and even as a young lawyer, Joseph M. Gagliardo worked in his parents' small grocery store in Chicago's Wrigleyville neighborhood.

Gagliardo, managing partner of Laner, Muchin, Dombrow, Becker, Levin & Tominberg Ltd. since 2005, said his parents stressed treating people with dignity and respect. He called the store very service-oriented.

"Those concepts have helped me as a lawyer because with a blue-collar background, I'm able to relate to people at all levels," he said. "Our goal is get the client great results and to make sure the client is happy with the services we provide."

Laner, Muchin lawyers handle labor and employment matters both in the public and private sectors, he said. The firm, which opened in 1945, now consists of 41 lawyers — including 26 partners, six paralegals and 14 support staffers.

Carl S. Tominberg, a Laner, Muchin partner, said he met Gagliardo 30 years ago when Tominberg represented the city of Chicago in labor negotiations with its police and fire departments. At that time, Gagliardo served as first deputy corporation counsel for the city.

Tominberg said he recruited Gagliardo for Laner, Muchin because he's an outstanding lawyer "and probably the kind of guy most firms would want to have as a partner."

Gagliardo "has the ability to see problems from both sides, which is really important when you're trying to resolve labor matters," he

said. "He just had the knack for being able to gain the respect of both (sides) he's working with" including the adversaries.

Laner, Muchin's clients include the state of Illinois, the city of Chicago and Donald Trump and the Trump Organization.

Gagliardo also serves as chairman of Laner, Muchin's litigation department.

The firm includes a traditional labor group, an employee benefit group and a business integration unit, Gagliardo said. That unit focuses on advising clients on immigration issues and helping clients move key personnel to the U.S., he said.

Laner, Muchin lawyers commit to returning client phone calls within two hours, he said.

"We're very service-driven," he said. "As part of that service, the goal is to return client calls as quickly as possible, but certainly within two hours."

Laner, Muchin plans to increase its business with both existing and prospective clients, he said. The firm stresses what it calls workplace intelligence based on its years of experience, understanding of the law and the realities of the workplace.

"We try to roll those up into one package in terms of providing practical advice to clients that not only solves their problems today but also protects them going forward," he said.

Gagliardo said as managing partner he makes himself available to the partners when dealing with serious issues and usually discusses those matters with them before formal meetings. He also serves as chairman of Laner, Muchin's five-member executive committee.

Tominberg said, "When you have



Joseph M. Gagliardo

Managing Partner, Laner, Muchin, Dombrow, Becker, Levin & Tominberg Ltd.

- **Headquarters:** Chicago.
- **Size:** Declined to reveal revenue figures.
- **Lawyers:** 41.
- **Office:** One.
- **Age:** 59.
- **Law school:** The John Marshall Law School, 1977.
- **Organizations:** Trustee, The John Marshall Law School Board of Trustees; member, board of directors for Better Business Bureau serving Chicago and Northern Illinois; and member, board of directors for AgeOptions, a local agency that links seniors with available services and resources.
- **Interests:** Collecting and listening to music; playing bass guitar for Cool Rockin' Daddies, a band that opened for groups including Cheap Trick, the Doobie Brothers and ZZ Top.

a firm full of egos, you need someone who can deal with those egos."

Gagliardo "knows how to deal with people," he said. "I've never seen anybody better at it."

Gagliardo said he tries to lead by example.

"So, from a work standpoint, I don't ask people to do things I would not do myself," he said. "If there's an emergency matter, I stay and work side-by-side with the lawyers, whether it be nights, weekends or both."

John F. Schomberg, general

counsel in the office of Gov. Patrick J. Quinn, said Gagliardo handles litigation for the state arising out of collective bargaining agreements and appears before the Illinois Labor Relations Board on the state's behalf.

"He has an incredible knowledge base both in the law and in his experience representing public entities," he said.

"He and his law firm are always accessible. He makes himself personally accessible, (including on) nights, weekends and holidays."

Schomberg also called Gagliardo down-to-earth.

"You wouldn't know he's one of the most highly respected (labor) attorneys given how he treats employees at all levels within the state. He is a service-oriented attorney."

Gagliardo said the main challenge facing him as managing partner involves the sluggish economy.

"When the economy is sluggish, it causes employers to focus on controlling expenses, which may affect the timing of when legal services are provided," he said.

So, Laner, Muchin provides alternative billing arrangements, including flat fees, which "are a way of controlling costs," he said.

Gagliardo, a Chicago native, and his wife, Jennifer, are the parents of three adult sons.

Gagliardo attended The John Marshall Law School and graduated from there in 1977. After joining the Illinois bar on Nov. 21, 1977, Gagliardo opened a solo general practice near Wrigley Field.

Nearly a year later, he joined the City of Chicago's Law Department.

"I went there with the idea of staying a couple of years and moving on," he said.

But he worked there for the next decade, including a stint as first deputy corporation counsel.

While with the corporation counsel's office, Gagliardo worked closely with Laner, Muchin lawyers on labor and employment matters.

He joined Laner, Muchin as a partner in 1988.

"I was impressed with the firm's level and quality of service and I liked the people," he said.

Tominberg said Gagliardo deals well with people at all levels from sophisticated businessmen to police officers and firefighters.

Gagliardo "has a knack for dealing with every type of person," he said.

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