

Beyond the Century Mark

Legacy of Excellence Continues for Evansville Firm

By Katie Coffin

A lot can change in 100 years. Michael Schopmeyer will be the first person to tell you that.

Kahn, Dees, Donovan & Kahn (KDDK), a full-service business law firm in Evansville where he is a co-managing partner, celebrated its centennial anniversary in 2008 (*BizVoice*[®] profiled the milestone in May-June of that year).

Since then, the firm has grown its staff, started the transition from its third to fourth generation of leadership, weathered the Great Recession and expanded focus areas and community involvement.

However, the things that have changed about the law firm, Schopmeyer observes, are actually a result of what has remained consistent.

If it ain't broke ...

KDDK is still committed to its founding principles of effectively representing clients, providing a positive work environment for employees and contributing to the community.

"Over the last several years, this has meant broadening and deepening our areas of practice," Schopmeyer explains. "KDDK attorneys have become well versed in employer implications of the Affordable Care Act, Medicare set-aside agreements in worker's compensation cases, family law and estate planning for non-married couples and other issues of importance to our corporate and individual clients that have emerged in recent years."

The staff of 36 attorneys remains true to the concept of "principled negotiation." The term was coined by the Harvard Negotiation Project, a global institute designed to improve the theory and practice of conflict resolution and negotiation. Many KDDK attorneys have attended the corresponding weeklong course at Harvard Law School, and the ethical method is a cornerstone in KDDK's approach to its practice.

"Principled negotiation allows parties with disparate views to come up with outcomes that are win-win, or at least closer to win-win than position bargaining or an adversarial system, which is costly, slow and extremely hazardous to relationships," Schopmeyer indicates.

The combination of these best practices has allowed the industry honors to continue flowing. In August, three KDDK attorneys, including Schopmeyer, were selected by their peers for inclusion in *The Best Lawyers in America*[®] 2015 list. Earlier this year, *Super Lawyers*[®] Magazine recognized six KDDK attorneys for outstanding legal representation. The firm also holds strong in the Martindale-Hubbell ratings, with several attorneys achieving the highest distinction – AV Preeminent.

'Big-city law, small-town service'

Not only are KDDK attorneys successful in the office, but they are "heavily involved in the community right now," Schopmeyer emphasizes.

KDDK works closely with the Chamber of Commerce of Southwest Indiana and regionalization efforts. Its attorneys are engaged in several projects, such as Interstate 69 development and BridgeLink, a regional group focused on a new interstate bridge from Evansville to Henderson, Kentucky.

"Lawyers are particularly well trained to provide leadership on efforts like that, some of which are lobbying, some of which are facilitating community dialogue," Schopmeyer declares. "We help bring people with different minds and diverse cultures together to try and work out a shared vision."

Evansville has also undergone significant development within the city, including new and renovated museums, the Ford Center arena, a 257-room Hilton DoubleTree downtown hotel (slated to open in fall 2015) and a new sports complex (scheduled for next spring).

The Indiana Chamber recognized Evansville as Community of the Year in 2006 when Schopmeyer was board chairman of the then-Evansville Chamber of Commerce.

"The transformation in Evansville is impressive," Schopmeyer affirms. "We're (KDDK) proud to be a part of that."

Its strong roots in the community are coupled with success nationally and internationally.



Among law firms, KDDK is the oldest continuous supporter of the Indiana Chamber. The firm became a member in 1940.

"From a global perspective, KDDK may be considered a relatively small firm in a relatively small market. We're okay with that; more importantly, our clients are okay with that," Schopmeyer concedes. "From advanced manufacturers to closely-held businesses to individuals, our clients appreciate our ability to practice 'big-city law' while providing 'small-town service.'"

Looking ahead

Attorneys are the foundation of KDDK's success and future. The firm operates with a team approach, Schopmeyer explains. Even during the recession, it was able to take care of staff.

"While the legal services industry wasn't immune to the economic downturn, with numerous law firms downsizing, we actually grew from 29 to 36 attorneys," Schopmeyer notes. "We were blessed by our age, I guess, because we were able to maintain benefits that many of our peers and clients were forced to cut."

All new hires are from the Evansville area, he says, and they have strengthened the firm in the fields of health care, worker's compensation and construction. The future looks bright for KDDK.

"As KDDK transitions from the third to the fourth generation of firm leaders, it's as important as ever for us to remember and celebrate our history," Schopmeyer concludes. "The values that guided the firm for the past 100-plus years will certainly remain the foundation on which we continue to build our legacy of legal excellence."

To view the May-June 2008 *BizVoice* story on Kahn, Dees, Donovan & Kahn, visit the archives section of www.bizvoicemagazine.com.

RESOURCE: G. Michael Schopmeyer, Kahn, Dees, Donovan & Kahn, at www.kddk.com