

2011 Volunteer of the Year

Brian McDermott



By Symone C. Skrzycki

Stepping into Brian McDermott's office, one is immediately struck by the sweeping view of downtown Indianapolis. Sports and concert memorabilia adorn the walls. Family photos sit atop his desk and on shelves. This space provides a window of sorts, too, into McDermott's life.

In one corner, sits a basketball. But it's not just any basketball. Signed by members of the Indiana Pacers and Colts superstar Peyton Manning, it was auctioned off at an event benefiting Sheltering Wings, an organization that assists women and youth who have experienced domestic abuse. McDermott is a volunteer.

He also is a former board member (and remains involved) with Child Advocates, which "provides advocates for children in the court system where they might not otherwise have a voice."

When I comment on a colorful drawing hanging near his computer, he proudly shares that one of his children is the artist.

It's clear that McDermott is a man of many passions – with loved ones, community and career high on the list.

"I'm very dedicated and loyal to those I serve, whether it be family, clients or colleagues," he declares.

Early days

McDermott is a shareholder at Ogletree Deakins, one of the nation's largest labor and employment law firms. He helped form its Indianapolis office in 2000.

Growing up in Iowa, sports such as baseball and basketball occupied much of McDermott's free time, but academics were always a priority.

"My parents raised me to really concentrate on education and do well in school," he recalls.

His affinity for athletics and learning converged when the time came to choose a career.

"When I went to college, I had done well in certain areas that kind of gravitated towards the legal field. So, I think what really led me to go into law were my competitive nature and interest in intellectual challenge. Both of those goals are met every day in the law (profession)," he asserts.

While attending the University of Iowa, he spent the summer of 1991 in Indianapolis completing a clerkship at a local law firm. A similar position followed at the federal level.

"One thing that I think gives me a good perspective on my work today is that when I did the clerkship for federal Judge Donald Porter – who was a great, great mentor for me – he showed how as a judge, you have to be fair to both sides and make difficult decisions," he reflects. "I saw it from that perspective and now I'm a litigator in front of judges, so that helps me prepare for my work for my clients."

Helping businesses help themselves

One of the things McDermott enjoys most about practicing employment law is its focus on people.

"This is an area where there's a lot of interaction with people – whether it's HR professionals (or) business owners," he explains. "There are other areas like business transactions or tax benefits where you're focused a lot on documents, and that doesn't fit my personality as well. So, it's more the people part of the business that I like."

"What I find most rewarding is the relationships we build with clients and friends in the business community."

McDermott also thrives on the complexity of labor relations issues.



Brian McDermott makes a point during his presentation at the Indiana Chamber's recent Employee Benefits Seminar. He also serves on the policy side as a member of the employment law committee.

“Those laws and rules are changing all of the time based upon what administration is leading the charge and what that agency’s political makeup might be. When that changes, the laws and rules change, and we really have to keep our clients apprised of those developments,” he stresses.

Keeping clients connected

McDermott has partnered with the Indiana Chamber for more than a decade to help educate businesses on ever-changing employment and labor laws.

He regularly speaks at the organization’s annual human resources conference and at other training seminars covering issues such as FMLA (Family and Medical Leave Act) and worker’s compensation. At an employee benefits seminar this fall, he co-presented a session on the importance of wellness.

“On the wellness side of things, there are some employment aspects that really come into play like GINA (Genetic Information Nondiscrimination Act), which helps regulate employment,” he remarks. “That’s an example of how I bring the employment side to the benefits side.”

In addition, he has written or contributed to several Chamber employer guides revolving around leave issues, interviewing, religion in the workplace and more.

“I think the Chamber is really the voice of – and a resource for – the business community. I’ve enjoyed being kind of a small part of that wonderful mission,” he emphasizes.



Family, law and community are among McDermott’s passions.

“The professionals there deliver on a daily basis to companies throughout Indiana. And, what we do (Ogletree Deakins’ collaboration with the Chamber’s publications and conferences divisions) hopefully adds a little bit to that: educating businesses on compliance with HR laws to make sure that they’re running effectively and efficiently.”

Matt Ottinger, Chamber director of publications, observes, “Brian is proactive in contacting us when there are changes to laws and regulations. That’s so critical for helping us serve our customers as well as we can.”

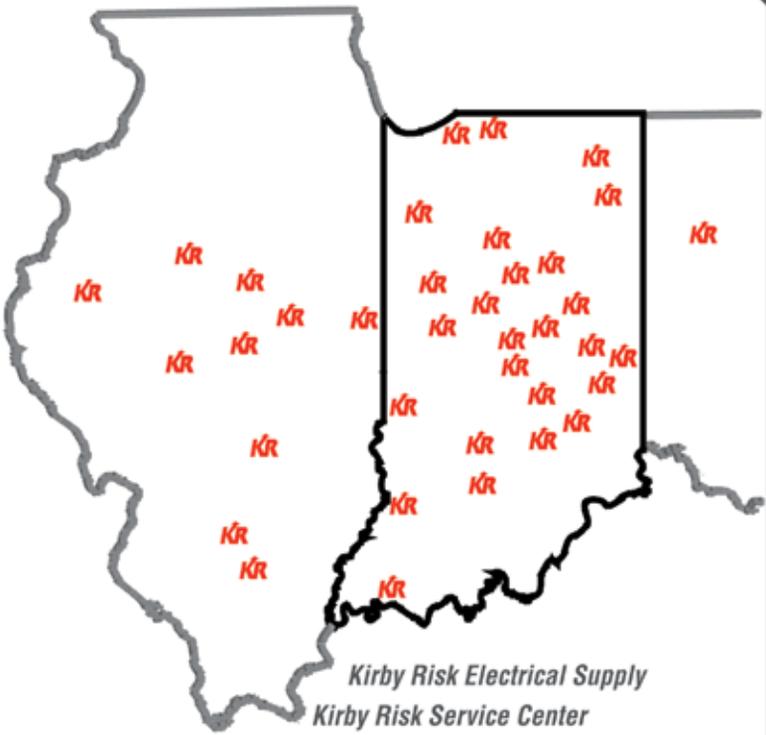
Kerri Begley, vice president of conferences and special events, adds, “Brian has been a great resource for us, particularly on ADA, FMLA and regulations topics. He consistently gets high scores from attendees and is one of their favorite presenters.”



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