

Renaissance Men and Women

Attorneys such as John Horn of Harter Secrest & Emery LLP help guide Buffalo's revitalization from behind the scenes.

BY PATRICK CONNELLY
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As 2019 neared a close, so did the career of longtime attorney Anthony Mancinelli of Harter Secrest & Emery LLP.

"He helped get (the firm) off the ground in Buff also when he started here in 1996," said John Horn, partner in charge of the local office.

The firm was established in Rochester but spread west to the Nickel City in the 1990s. Horn, a litigator, joined in 2000 and has seen local operations grow to the current 34 attorneys.

New space in Fountain Plaza will bring more room for expansion.

"For a regional office, a big Upstate firm or any firm anywhere, to have that kind of sustained success is really something that we're very proud of and thankful for," Horn said.

The future looks just as promising – not only for Harter Secrest but the Western New York legal industry as an economic and developmental renaissance spurs needs for counsel in myriad sectors.

A survey of attorneys who guide the direction of their firms found that continued technological advancements, data-privacy regulations and security breaches (or the threat thereof) will prompt businesses and other entities to seek legal guidance.

"I think that's going to continue to be a hot area for businesses of all shapes, sizes and descriptions," Horn said. "The interconnectedness of everything is moving so quickly."

Elizabeth Midgley is a partner at Stillwell Midgley PLLC. She said businesses need to be cognizant that traditional mindsets may need to be changed when it comes to data security.

"(Companies) do not understand the numerous risks that are posed by a security breach, not only to their clients but to their firm's reputation and operations," she said.

Businesses must weave new data-privacy legislative measures into their regular operations, said Jennifer Beckage, managing partner of Beckage PLLC. Her firm opened in 2018 and specializes in services that surround the data security arena.

"Given the current patchwork of privacy legislation, companies need to expect the unexpected in 2020 while avoiding one-off, knee-jerk solutions to every new law that is passed," she

said.

Along with digital privacy, Phillips Lytle LLP Managing Partner Kevin Hogan predicts advancements in the tech revolution may drive increased legal needs around autonomous machines, artificial intelligence, clean technologies in the energy sector and more.

Contingent on how state legislation progresses, Hogan said cannabis and hemp law will further emerge, too.

"Additionally, depending on how the economy progresses in 2020, we may see an increase in work from the labor and employment; bankruptcy and creditor's rights; and foreclosure practice areas," he said.

While Harter Secrest, Phillips Lytle and other large Buffalo firms became mainstays with attorneys in many practice areas, boutique firms found their niche in more specialized realms.

Stillwell Midgley opened in 2018 with a focus on defense work in medical malpractice for nurses and physicians. The firm also serves health care providers such as hospitals and extended-care facilities. The firm works in general civil litigation, as well.

"We have grown much quicker than we thought, which has been wonderful, and the support we have gotten from the community has been amazing," Midgley said.

She plans to add lawyers and other staff.

"The future of our firm focuses on our team," Midgley said. "We have a fantastic group that will continue to keep the firm growing stronger and continue to offer the best for our clients and the community."

Meanwhile, automotive injury attorney William Mattar predicts that tech advances that made vehicles safer could result in fewer cases being brought by clients.

His Williamsville-based firm has become a regional leader in that sector of personal injury law. The firm expanded to approximately 130 employees this year across its footprint.

"Although car crashes remain prevalent due mainly to distracted driving, we do anticipate an overall decline in cases over the next few years due to accident-avoidance systems in newer cars," he said.

Mattar's firm helped resolve more cases in 2019 than in other years.

"Our firm uses strategic planning in the fourth quarter each year to out-



John Horn of Harter Secrest & Emery LLP

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line and plan the upcoming year's strategic initiatives and projects," he said. "We also use a 'vision' which has us look three years into the future to see what (our) firm will look and feel like then."

Continued community involvement and a push for positive change is part of that vision, he added.

Beckage said strategic planning plays an important part in how any business can look toward the future and stay driven.

"Law firms are no exception," she said. "We are continually revisiting our strategic plans and adjust when appropriate while maintaining our unique focus on tech, data security and privacy."

Hogan said firms that have attorneys in varying sectors need to continually evolve to best meet client needs.

"We constantly look for new ways to create value for our clients," he said. "We continuously seek client feedback in a variety of ways as we know that

hearing from our clients is the best compass for the future."

Labor and employment needs of clients will continue to be a huge focus for many, Horn concurred.

Those needs, he said, have been buoyed by economic growth in the Buffalo area and changing mindsets in workplace culture. Some of the latter have come from the political push for prevention of sexual harassment and discrimination.

Just as important is hiring the right people who can identify what the future could present, attorneys agreed.

"We try to think about that before it's actually a trend so it's tooled up, spun up and ready to go when it develops,"

Horn said. "It's really (about) having an eye on the business opportunity and then the people in the community or coming up through the law school ranks who will help us build a good client service team around those opportunities."