

Law Firm Leaders

Mrozek leads his firm's strategy

By John Flynn Rooney
Law Bulletin staff writer

Donald L. Mrozek, head of Hinshaw & Culbertson LLP, said he believes he is the longest serving firm chairman in Chicago.

Mrozek assumed that role in 1989, when Hinshaw & Culbertson's employee roster stood at about a quarter of its current size — around 960 employees, including 500 lawyers. The Chicago-based firm ran 10 offices in 1989 and now maintains 24 offices throughout the country.

"With the increase in size and the increase in (Hinshaw & Culbertson's) geographic scope, my position has definitely become more and more strategic long-term thinking," said Mrozek, who joined the firm out of law school in 1973. "Whereas at the beginning, I did it all."

Hinshaw & Culbertson began in 1934 as a small local law firm and grew into a national presence.

Now Hinshaw & Culbertson "must think about an international expansion as well," Mrozek said. "We are doing that, trying to determine the best course of action in that regard."

A number of Hinshaw & Culbertson's clients face issues in China, so the firm could open an outpost there, Mrozek said. The firm could also start offices in Europe and South America.

James R. Figliulo, a partner with Figliulo & Silverman P.C., has known Mrozek for about 25 years and called his friend a steady leader.

"I think (Mrozek) is like the quintessential law firm leader," Figliulo said. "He's got the confidence of the lawyers in his firm from the senior people ... to the young charging, aggressive partners to the individual associate lawyers."

Mrozek said he now spends less time running the day-to-day workings of the firm, but continues a business litigation practice. He instead focuses on the firmwide strategies.

"I think overall the balance of continuing to practice has helped my leadership skills at the firm," Mrozek said.

As chairman, Mrozek said he works closely with Kevin Joseph Burke, Hinshaw & Culbertson's vice chairman, and J. William Roberts, the firm's managing partner.

Hinshaw & Culbertson's management committee consists of seven members, while the firm's executive committee comprises 24 partners.



Donald L. Mrozek

Chairman

Hinshaw & Culbertson LLP

Headquarters: Chicago.

Size: For 2011, \$208 million in revenue.

Lawyers: About 500.

Offices: 24.

Age: 64.

Law school: DePaul University College of Law, 1973.

Organizations: Chairman, DePaul University College of Law Dean's Council; executive committee member, Chicago Inn of Court; and director, the Constitutional Rights Foundation Chicago.

Interests: Reading, exercise, playing golf and bridge and following Chicago sports teams.

The firm includes 23 practice groups divided among six departments.

"That's where the work gets done," Mrozek said.

Many people know Hinshaw & Culbertson for its insurance defense practice. But the firm also expanded into other practice areas, Mrozek said.

“One of the challenges I think the firm faces today is to get the message out that we are a firm that has a considerable business practice, both transactional and litigation, which supplements very nicely our insurance practice,” Mrozek said.

Hinshaw & Culbertson continues trying to expand its national representation of corporations in areas including medical device litigation, toxic tort litigation, consumer and class action litigation, Mrozek said.

“These are booming areas for us and something that takes advantage of our national scope,” Mrozek said.

Another part of Mrozek’s job as Hinshaw & Culbertson’s chairman involves shepherding the firm’s financial success, he said.

“It’s a firm not only with solid financial revenue and a great client base, but we also have a very strong balance sheet, meaning little or no debt,” Mrozek said.

Dan L. Boho, who leads Hinshaw & Culbertson’s defense litigation department, said Mrozek plays a key role in setting partner compensation.

Mrozek “listens well, has true vision and

has kept the firm financially grounded even in difficult financial times,” Boho said. “We are very financially transparent, which makes us somewhat unique among larger firms.”

Another continuing challenge for Hinshaw & Culbertson relates to diversity of the firm’s employees, Mrozek said.

Hinshaw & Culbertson for the third consecutive year received perfect ratings in the Human Rights Campaign 2012 Corporate Equality Index survey. The survey rates major companies and law firms on a scale from zero to 100 percent on various criteria intended to measure their workplace treatment of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender employees.

In the July 2011 Chicago Lawyer diversity surveys issue, Hinshaw & Culbertson listed the highest number of minority lawyers, minority partners and female partners among Illinois law firms. The survey showed Hinshaw & Culbertson employed 159 female lawyers, including 76 female partners and a total of 68 minority lawyers, including 26 partners.

“We are committed to diversity and proud of our accomplishments,” Mrozek said. But “the challenge never ends.”

Mrozek “is a tremendous leader and a

fierce advocate for the promotion of women and diverse attorneys within the firm,” said Renee J. Mortimer, a Hinshaw & Culbertson partner who runs the firm’s Schererville, Ind., office. “He is and has been a great mentor to all of us throughout his years at Hinshaw.”

Mrozek, 64, grew up on Chicago’s Southwest Side and attended St. Rita of Cascia High School. He received a football scholarship from Northwestern University and graduated with a bachelor’s degree from there in 1969.

He then taught English at Mount Carmel High School and later at St. Rita while attending night classes at DePaul University College of Law.

Mrozek and his wife of 43 years, Pat, are the parents of four adult children and have four grandchildren.

In his free time, Mrozek reads biographies and historical novels. He enjoys playing bridge and follows local sports teams such as the Chicago White Sox, Bears, Bulls and Blackhawks.

Mrozek also hits the links when possible.

“I also enjoy golf, but you won’t find me on the Senior Tour,” Mrozek said referring to the Professional Golfers’ Association of America.