

Hogan to take the reins of Phillips Lytle leadership

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There is an air of familiarity between Kevin Hogan and the law firm of Phillips Lytle that has created a mutually comfortable feeling as he takes over as managing partner.

He has been an attorney at Buffalo's second largest firm for the past 25 years. Since making partner in 2000, Hogan has held an array of leadership posts, including environmental practice team leader, trial department administrator and 11 years on the Governing Committee, which leads the firm and ultimately selects the managing partner.

The firm, on the other hand, is looking to continue its growth over its eight-office footprint, including at its Buffalo headquarters where it is in the third year of a transition to the heart of the Buffalo renaissance at One Canalside.

But Hogan warns that comfort shouldn't be mistaken for complacency.

The Albany-area native said he'll never feel satisfied with the position of the firm, but thanks to the hard work of past partners, there is already a large stable of clients, both regionally and internationally. That helps the firm deal with the ebbs and flows of the industry and economy, Hogan said. It's also one of the reasons the firm was able to avoid any cuts during the downturn of the economy starting in 2008.

"I'm never so comfortable that my guard is down. For my clients, at least, whenever I go into court, they will never hear me say, 'It's a slam dunk,'" he said. "Clients have grown to understand and expect that they'll receive client service beyond anything they can get anywhere else and from anyone else. Does that make us feel comfortable? Maybe it makes us feel confident but not complacent."

The 54-year-old Hogan has been appointed to succeed David McNamara at the start of 2017. McNamara, who has been the firm's managing partner since 2007, decided to step aside and resume his practice full-time focusing on business litigation and project development. Spanning nearly three decades, there's been only four managing partners at the firm: Robert Greene, Paul Zuydhoek and Morgan Graham.

"The ideal time to step out of this position is when the firm is in a position of strength," McNamara said. "Kevin will lead the firm forward with the same level of enthusiasm, dedication and thoughtfulness that he has demonstrated in his practice and all of his various other roles throughout his career."

Hogan said there were a number of qualified candidates considered. After examining everyone from the partnership to see if they had the skillset and qualifications for the job, the list was narrowed down to a final group before the Governing Committee sought final consultation from various partners. Hogan said he's



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Kevin Hogan will take over as managing partner Phillips Lytle at the start of 2017.

experienced enough to know all of the partners and most of the clients throughout the firm's different industry sectors.

"I think based on those various positions I've held in management at the firm, I was among the better suited for the job, but it wasn't a quick decision by the Governing Committee," he said. "While the shoes will be big to fill and it's a significant challenge, it's one that I welcome."

Being that his practice is in the area of environmental law, Hogan has enjoyed the experience of servicing all of the practice groups throughout the firm and their clients. They all look to the environmental practice team for support, he said. So, like Graham, who shares a similar practice, Hogan steps into the job with a familiarity with many of the firm's partners.

"That familiarity will enhance my ability to set the internal tone and set the corporate culture at Phillips Lytle," said Hogan, who had a clerkship at the U.S. Court of Appeals in New York City before coming to Phillips Lytle.

Hogan feels he'll have the ability to balance being the face of the firm and represent the firm accordingly outside of the office, as well. The graduate of Vermont Law School has been heavily involved in the community since moving to Buffalo more than two decades ago. He's been on the board of ECMC since 2004, the last four years as the chair. He's also a federal mediator for the U.S. District Court in the Western District of New York.

"Based on what I've seen from the last four managing partners, an ability to balance both the internal and external focus are so important to this position," he said.

He feels that regardless of what practice one comes from all 75 partners at Phillips Lytle should work as one and are expected to contribute to the managing of the firm in more ways than just bringing in and servicing clients and creating revenue. There are about 20 management positions of various sizes and commitments at the firm.

Once he takes over as managing partner, Hogan hopes to visit with as many attorneys as possible. He'd also like to stay on top of recruiting, training and promoting the next generation of partners, so that the next group seamlessly replaces retiring partners. That was a goal of McNamara's and will continue with Hogan at the helm.

Meanwhile, he'll be shadowing McNamara for the rest of the year to aid in the transition. However, the even bigger transition, according to Hogan, will be the one he is making in his practice as he goes from a full-time lawyer to a nearly full-time managing partner.

He's already communicated with his clients to assure them that they will not see any change in the level of service they receive. He'll stay on as the relationship manager for all of his clients and will be the point person on their dockets, but he will hand down some of the day-to-day work to other attorneys.

Hogan said it has helped that Phillips Lytle has always been able to bring in quality attorneys from out of the area who either are Buffalo natives looking to come back or come to Buffalo because they marry someone from the area, like Hogan once did.

"When I turn to my clients and tell them that they're not going to see any drop off in client service or change in the quality of results and one of the reasons is going to be because one of the people taking over the reins for me was a Kirkland & Ellis partner for 10 years in New York City, their reaction is, 'Wow, how did you get him,'" Hogan said.

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