

# Chicago Daily Law Bulletin®

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## Michael Best celebrates Chicago office's 25th year

### Wisconsin firm added five local lawyers in 1990; now employs 30

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When Michael Best & Friedrich LLP hires new lawyers, it looks beyond resumes.

"We have a 'no-jerks' policy at the firm, which is we will not hire jerks," said Kerryann M. Haase Minton. "That doesn't mean that we don't have really smart, aggressive litigators. What that means is that we don't hire attorneys who belittle or berate or are yellers or screamers at other people."

Although Minton, the Chicago office's managing partner, may have given the "no-jerks policy" its name, she said this culture has been with the firm since its founding.

Michael Best celebrated the 25th anniversary of its Chicago office this past spring. The Milwaukee-based defense firm has more than 220 attorneys nationwide and practices in litigation, employment, intellectual property and transactional law, which includes corporate, securities, real estate, taxes and other subgroups.

The Chicago office is the firm's third-largest office with 30 attorneys and seven professional staff which includes patent engineers and paralegals. Minton said the firm will have five more attorneys and five more professional staff by mid-September.

While the office's core

strengths are its intellectual property, employment and labor practices, Minton said they are currently looking for transactional attorneys.

"The plan for growth is really thoughtful growth," she said. "It's really hiring people who fit into our culture and who are smart, talented lawyers who want to serve as trusted advisers to their clients."

Michael Best's Chicago presence started with five former Chadwell & Kayser attorneys in 1990. John J. McHugh, founder of the Chicago office who is now retired from the firm, said changes in government enforcement of antitrust laws led to work drying up for antitrust law firms in the early 1980s. He said it was only a matter of time before firms such as Chadwell would be gone, which happened at the end of 1989.

McHugh had a long-standing relationship with Michael Best partner John K. MacIver, who asked him if he would be interested in opening up a Chicago office for the firm. McHugh said he and Chadwell colleague Thomas C. Hynes, who later became Cook County assessor, drove to Milwaukee on a Saturday to discuss the proposal.

"We decided we would give it a try," McHugh said.

When the local office opened, their first practice areas were in corporate law, banking, litigation, securities and underwriting. A big part of getting the business started, McHugh said, was recruiting attorneys.

"When you're starting out, that's the critical part, having talented people," he said. "We



Kerryann M. Haase Minton

were very fortunate."

One of his earliest hires was Minton herself. She was a 1995 summer associate and the first associate hired out of law school into the office in 1996. McHugh taught young lawyers how to build a book of business, Minton said, and fostered mentoring as part of their firm's culture, which continues today. Associates regularly receive feedback on projects and are invited to attend client pitch meetings.

"He (McHugh) really focused on the critical importance of getting to know your client's business, getting to understand the industry they're in ... and what keeps the president and the general counsel up at night and to figure out where they need help and help them by being a good problem-solver," she said.

The firm went through a strategic planning process in 2010, Minton said, which called for more growth in the Chicago office and led to the addition of a life sciences group locally in 2011.

Michael Best firmwide managing partner David A. Krutz said in a statement that the city has a reputation as a center for national and international business, which makes it a priority in the firm's future growth. He sees it in areas such as IP, life sciences and trademark, employment relations and government relations.

"The twenty-fifth anniversary of our presence in Chicago is a significant milestone which is more special because of the growth of the office in the last five years and the addition of top-level attorneys to serve the needs of our clients," he said.

In 2014, the firm also launched a public policy consulting spinoff — Michael Best Strategies LLC — which has nine staff members in offices in Washington, D.C., Madison, Wis., Milwaukee and Chicago. Among the Strategies staff is senior adviser Charles "Chip" W. Englander, who was Gov. Bruce Rauner's campaign manager.

The Chicago office has two people, and Minton said two more people will be joining Strategies this summer.

Along with continuing to recruit attorneys, Minton said another priority for the office is building brand awareness in Chicago.

"We're a Wisconsin-based firm, and in Wisconsin we're one of the biggest firms there, so everyone knows who Michael Best is," she said.

"It's important that we get to the same level in Chicago that the business owners and business leaders know who Michael Best is."