



THINK FORWARD

A Look Back, But Thinking Forward: Intellectual Property Law Firm Brinks Gilson & Lione Celebrates Its Centennial in 2017

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CHICAGO—A passion for intellectual property law. A commitment to exceptional client service. A culture of teamwork. For 100 years, these qualities have been the drivers of success for the IP law boutique now known as Brinks Gilson & Lione.

January 1, 2017 marks Brinks Gilson & Lione's centennial anniversary. The firm that originated as a two-man practice in Chicago's First National Bank Building today has more than 140 attorneys, scientific advisors and patent agents serving clients globally in patent, trademark, trade secret, and copyright law from seven U.S. locations.

Along the way, Brinks attorneys have argued at the Supreme Court, protected thousands upon thousands of client patents, trademarks, trade secrets, and copyrights, and now have recommitted to confronting the challenges of a new century of practicing IP law.

"Staying true to our core values has allowed Brinks to survive and thrive," said IP litigator James R. Sobieraj, who joined the firm in 1982 and has served as its president since 2012. "It's how we've weathered challenging economic cycles, evolving IP and legal fields, and those unexpected circumstances that have sunk many other firms in the last century."

Those one hundred years, Sobieraj notes, have seen epochal changes in IP law, including passage of the Lanham Act, the establishment of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit, the 2011 advent of the America Invents Act, and the enactment in 2016 of the Defend Trade Secrets Act. Patent rights have been a swinging pendulum over the decades; and the world has seen sweeping industrial advances, from automobiles to airplanes in the 20th century to electronics and medicine in the 21st century.

Gus Siller—a patent litigator and shareholder who became Brinks' president-elect on January 1, 2017—notes that Brinks has never wavered in its commitment to advancing the interests of intellectual property owners.

"Boutique firms specializing in IP are becoming rare," says Siller, who recalls that there were many more specialty IP shops in 1988, when he sought to join a firm with IP capabilities and chose Brinks because of its energetic and progressive environment.

Siller notes that he has seen many of Brinks' peers fold or merge because they didn't adapt to a changing competitive landscape and higher client expectations with respect to services and fees.

"I saw Brinks as unique when I joined it, and I still regard Brinks as a firm that's remained unique in today's environment," says Siller. "Our attorneys have top-notch trial, litigation, counseling, and opinion skills, and we offer exceptional value."

That value derives from Brinks' focus on delivering outstanding service. Notes patent prosecutor Bashir M.S. Ali, Ph.D., a shareholder who helped establish Brinks' office in Research Triangle Park, N.C. in 2008, clients benefit from the ability of the firm's attorneys to understand the challenges inventors face.

"In addition to having advanced technical degrees, many of us have experience working in-house or in industry," says Dr. Ali, whose doctorate is in chemistry and who himself is an inventor with two patents. "We're able to understand inventions quickly, make the clients' problems our own, and help solve them."

Shareholder Laura A. Lydigsen, who joined Brinks in 2007 and is chair of its appellate practice group, appreciates being able to tap into her colleagues' knowledge across a wide spectrum of disciplines.

"I don't have to seek an outside expert to help me understand a case," says Lydigsen. "Whether it's immunology, pharmacology, organic or inorganic chemistry, Brinks patent prosecutors know the science inside and out, and are an exceptional resource when it comes to the technical side of a litigation."

Adds Lydigsen, "As a litigator, I want to have the best team possible. The ethos at Brinks is to give every individual an opportunity to make a difference, promoting collegiality and teamwork."

Dr. Ali also values being part of team—diverse not only in its professional and technical backgrounds but also in terms of race, ethnicity, and gender. "Brinks' culture of inclusion and respect helps us attract the best attorneys and make more informed business decisions," he said. "In turn, clients who value and appreciate diversity are comfortable working with us."

Adds Ali, "Diverse perspectives provide clients with a broader analysis of the issues that can arise in a complex business transaction or a 'bet-the-company' litigation."

Siller recalls how the Minority Corporate Counsel Association recognized Brinks Gilson & Lione's commitment to the hiring, retention, and promotion of diverse attorneys in 2009. Brinks was the first intellectual property law firm in the Midwest Region and only the second in the country to receive the Thomas L. Sager Award for diversity.

Says Siller, who chaired Brinks' diversity committee from 2002 to 2009, "The Sager award had historically been given to general practice firms with much deeper resources, so I was especially proud to see Brinks recognized."

As the firm moves into its second century, Siller sees Brinks developing its representation of international clients, particularly in China, Korea, and Japan. The firm's office in technology research and development center Shenzhen, China, its first overseas, is expected to receive regulatory approval in 2017 and will serve companies throughout the region in addressing their intellectual property issues in the U.S.

Taking a longer-term view, Siller notes, "Not many law firms in the U.S. have been around for 100 years. I hope we'll remain independent and a leader in the field: a firm that clients can turn to for excellent representation and excellent value."

As Brinks lawyers continue to focus their practice at the nexus of some of the world's most complex and valuable innovations—in pharmaceuticals, chemicals, bioengineering, industrial manufacturing, electronics and software, medical devices, and related technologies—firm president Sobieraj expects Brinks to continue along its current successful arc and to grow.

"Innovation is a pillar of our country's culture and economic success," he says. "Innovation leads to the need for IP protection and for good IP lawyers—people committed to IP because it's their passion. That passion, together with the ability to adapt while staying true to our values, has been the key to our success and will drive Brinks forward."

Adds Sobieraj, "Of course I hope Brinks attorneys 100 years from now are proud of our legacy, but my guess is they'll still be looking forward and not back."

Brinks Gilson & Lione

Celebrating its centennial year in 2017, Brinks Gilson & Lione is one of the largest intellectual property law firms in the US, and helps clients around the world to protect and enforce their intellectual property rights. Our more than 140 lawyers, patent agents and scientific advisors assist clients in all aspects of patent, trademark, unfair competition, trade secret, and copyright law. Brinks attorneys provide informed counsel with respect to innovations in a range of complex and valuable technologies, including pharmaceuticals, chemicals, bioengineering, industrial manufacturing, electronics and software, and medical devices. More information is at www.brinksgilson.com.