

## HARVEY LEVIN

### Renaissance Man Keeps Varied Practice Fresh

by Mike Bailey

MOLINE—Although he is entering the fifth decade of his career, attorney Harvey Levin is no dinosaur, flummoxed by modern technology or bewildered by its rapid changes.

“I’m a technology buff,” he says. “I travel extensively for business and pleasure and technology allows me to practice from anywhere.”

Levin, of **Califf & Harper** in Moline, has enjoyed a varied and high profile practice that includes clients like the Moline-Quad Cities International Airport, major apartment complex investors, and large and small companies across a variety of industries. It is that variety and unique challenges that keep his practice fresh.

Part of that challenge is providing legal services and financial consulting to businesses owned by his two sons.

His son Jason, who was recently named the Entrepreneur of the Year in earth sciences for the San Diego region, is president of Dos Gringos, a large national flower company, and his son David is president of Four Winds Interactive (FWI), a fast-growing Denver software company recently recognized by *Forbes Magazine* as one of the Top 100 most promising companies in America. Levin currently serves as general counsel to FWI.

“Being general counsel to the software company has added a whole new component to my practice,” Levin says. “I now negotiate contracts with Fortune 500 companies on a weekly basis. I thought the intellectual property aspects of the contracts would be toughest part of negotiations, but in reality it has been consistently, the indemnity clauses, the warranty clauses and the evergreen clauses. In addition, I recently completed negotiations with a difficult landlord on a three-story office building that will serve as the company’s headquarters. My son says my versatility including my real estate law background has been a valuable asset to the company.”

Levin’s varied experience and background makes him an excellent choice for clients looking for quality representation.

“I grew up in Chicago and Kankakee. After high school, I received my BA in accounting from Michigan State University and while there was a manger for the basketball team.”

#### From the Lakers to Airports

Levin attended Northwestern University law school, passed the Certified Public Accountant



exam while in school and after law school was admitted to the Illinois bar.

“After law school, my first job was in Los Angeles in the tax department of Arthur Young and Company. One of their clients was the Los Angeles Lakers. I did their tax returns in the late 1960s and had to review the contracts of star basketball players such as Wilt Chamberlain and Elgin Baylor.”

After service in the United States Army Security Agency, he joined a dual practice law and CPA firm in Chicago.

In 1974, Levin and his family moved to Moline to join Califf and Harper. Levin extended the practice back to Chicago to play into his broad experience and varied background. From 1982–1994 while maintaining his law practice, he served as chief financial officer and general counsel for Moline Paint Manufacturing Co., supplier of paint to many major farm implement manufacturers, including John Deere, Caterpillar and others.

While his clients and their needs have changed, one thing has not: his unwavering dedication and devotion to their legal issues.

One of Levin’s largest clients for 35 years was the local airport authority, which during his tenure upgraded and redeveloped the Quad City International Airport, requiring the construction of new facilities and a relocation of many buildings and offices from the north side of the airport to the south side. This involved extensive work with the Federal

Aviation Administration, complex financing issues, numerous lease negotiations and agreements with the air carriers, including United, American and Delta.

Levin is known nationally for his expertise in airport law.

His innovations in the area include negotiating one of first letters of credit for an airport and having formed an airport subsidiary to service the fueling and ground handling needs of the airlines and to lease space to the Transportation Security Agency.

“The subsidiary allowed the airport to fast track construction of a regional headquarters for the TSA as it was treated as a small business, thus avoiding many regulatory requirements. Negotiating the TSA lease through the General Services Administration was a real challenge,” he says.

His many contacts within the industry as well as federal regulators proved to be invaluable to the airport. Levin has served two terms as chairman of the Airports Council International—North America legal committee and maintains his friendship with many people in the industry.

When he joined Califf & Harper, his largest client was a Chicago manufacturing company that had a subsidiary involved in real estate and development. The company was poised to acquire or build warehouses and needed someone who could represent them in all aspects of their operations. Levin was the man chosen, a relationship he retains.

"The manufacturing operation was sold about five years ago, but the real estate development continues to this day," he says. "Right now, we are working on two projects on the northwest side of Chicago. One is the development of a grocery store and the other is a Chase bank branch, one of four that Chicago Mayor Rahm Emmanuel recently announced."

## Focus On Getting the Deal Done

Getting deals done is Levin's focus. John Stephens, of Burke, Warren, MacKay & Seritella in Chicago, worked through a particularly vexing real estate transaction with Levin and has nothing but praise for him.

"I represented a developer who purchased an industrial facility from Harvey's client," Stephens recalls. "It was complex in that it had been owned by a company that occupied the building, then sold and then sold again and there were environmental issues. Harvey did a very nice job navigating through those issues. He got us to the point where we felt comfortable to proceed."

"What I liked about him was that not only was he very savvy, but he knew how to get a deal done. He knew when to push and when to back off. He made sure to hold the deal together and move it toward a conclusion. You know, it's not about which lawyer is smarter. So many lawyers in my opinion really miss that point. They think it is about them and the minutia and not about getting a deal done for their client," he says.

Other real estate deals Levin has put together involve complicated arrangements in which individual buildings are owned in a partnership, roughly similar to a real estate investment trust (REIT).

"These differ from a REIT in that someone who invests in a REIT buys shares in the company that owns the buildings. These buildings each have their own partnership," he says.

The ventures are complex because they often involved outside financing, partnership groups and in some cases, construction.

"Harvey is just an excellent lawyer," says partner Frank Mitvalsky. "He has taught me not only the law, but also how to deal with people fairly. He also has a keen sense of the intricacies of the deal. He knows what it takes to get a deal done. His number one goal is service to the client."

Levin and Mitvalsky also have another client that buys apartment complexes all over the Midwest.

"These deals are very complex and they require a tag team approach," Levin says, echoing what many real estate development attorneys have found.

"I bring in my partner (Frank) Mitvalsky and others in the firm to help me with many clients."

That does two things, Levin says; it allows lawyers with specific knowledge to address certain issues to better serve the client, and it provides continuity to the firm.

## Team Approach Serves Client Best

"Harvey uses the team approach," says Mitvalsky. "He likes to get other people involved and use all the resources of the firm. He truly believes in the concept of partners and wants to leave the firm in good hands by passing along clients and getting us involved. The best thing about it is his accessibility. No matter where he is, if I have a problem, I can call him and he and I will work it out together."

Levin says that team approach is crucial because one lawyer can't be an expert in all areas of the law.

"There are a lot of challenges to put together deals," he says.

"Frank and I did one in Wisconsin where the client was buying four different properties from a distressed owner. The Anglo Irish bank provided the original financing. But when the loans came due, they were no longer in that business because of the problems Ireland was facing with its banking system. Anglo Irish had to be held at bay until HUD financing could be arranged. Meeting all HUD's requirements required working with attorneys for HUD, the HUD lender, the outside investors, and the client's bank to hold the financing together."

The complexity of some deals makes it essential that several lawyers with expertise in certain areas be involved, one of the advantages of working with a larger firm like Califf & Harper.

"One deal involved several financial partners and one was putting in substantially more equity. We had to fairly structure the deal to work out who would get how much money and when."

But while family business and local clients occupy the majority of his practice, Levin has a long-time client with specialty needs as well. "I'm helping him negotiate the purchase of mountain and ranch property in Colorado," he says. "I also helped this client recently buy a fishing camp in the Florida Everglades."

"To plan for the future, I try to tag team everything I do to pass on my knowledge to others in the firm so that when I decide to retire, my clients will be well served," he says. ■