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Chuhak & Tecson marks 30 years of steady growth

Firm cites range of experience, commitment to volunteerism as vital parts of its culture

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When Chicago attorneys Thomas S. Chuhak and Joseph A. Tecson decided to open their own firm along with nine other attorneys in 1987, one of their goals was to accommodate clients by offering a broad range of legal services.

The founding members' backgrounds included work with corporations, health care and non-profit groups, probate matters, pensions, tax law, estate planning and litigation.

"Collectively, the goal was to get a group of lawyers together who had a wide array of skills and practice areas so that we could service the full legal needs of our clients. Each of the people who came together had different backgrounds and expertise," said Andrew P. Tecson, the firm's president and son of the late Joseph Tecson.

"The goal was — because each of these people had clients whose needs were growing — there was a benefit to being able to say, 'Well, we'll provide a wide array of services, let's get together.' We brought all of that different expertise together and wound up with a great, small firm at the time."

Chuhak & Tecson P.C. is celebrating its 30th anniversary this year, which it intends to mark with an educational focus by sharing insight from its attorneys through presentations and a new online newsletter called Three Decades.

In its 30 years, the firm has expanded from 11 to 68 attorneys with an additional staff of about 75

people. Three of the firm's founding members, Andrew Tecson, Donald J. Russ Jr. and Arnold E. Karolewski, remain practicing attorneys with the firm today, and other original members are of counsel with the firm, Tecson said.

"We started small, but at the top of our game. The reputations of the founders were all pre-eminent attorneys ... those people all were recognized throughout the Chicago legal community as just top-notch lawyers, and we have continued that tradition," Tecson said.

"As long as you have the best lawyers who have the motivation and the culture that we want to promote, then we knew we would continue on, and I'm totally confident that 30 years from now, Chuhak & Tecson will still be here."

The firm's expansion over the years has included the growth of its banking practice group, which launched about 14 years ago with two or three attorneys and today has nearly 30 attorneys working in the practice.

Like its banking group, Tecson said the firm's steady growth over the years has been in conjunction with the expansion of its clients' business. One example Tecson cited is Clarke, a global environmental group that's known for its mosquito mitigation products and services. Joseph Tecson began working with Clarke's founder when Andrew Tecson was a child, and today the younger Tecson represents the company, which has grown from servicing about 10 states 30 years ago to having a global network today.



Andrew P. Tecson

Tecson said the firm has remained cautious in the method by which it has expanded its number of attorneys. While some firms are inclined to expand through mergers and acquisitions, Chuhak & Tecson's approach to adding talent has involved identifying one or two attorneys who complement the firm.

The firm differs from others, Tecson said, in that it has "less of a hierarchical management structure." Its shareholders meet monthly and its principals meet quarterly, he said.

"We've always been very gradual because we don't want to disrupt the culture of the firm," he said. "Being [midsize] gives us the opportunity to still bring in entrepreneurial people who have a high degree of initiative who want to have a voice in the future of the firm."

Another focus in growing the firm steadily has involved preparing the next generation of associates and young partners to market their own practices, which Tecson said has led to a "a high degree of success of our less experienced attorneys growing books of business, and that helps the firm continue to grow."

The firm took a leap in 2015, when it opened an office in New York, its only other location outside of Chicago. The expansion was the result of a New York-based bank client that sought Chuhak & Tecson's presence in the city.

"Like many things with us, it's gradual, it's slowly gathering its momentum and we're very optimistic about how that's going to turn out," Tecson said about the firm's New York office.

Tecson said the firm has also

grown in sync with its clients by focusing on succession planning from the firm's outset in 1987 by retaining clients through multiple generations of attorneys.

"One of the reasons that a number of midsize firms no longer exist is that they made the choice that they were better off joining a larger entity rather than having the next generation take the firm to a higher level," he said.

In addition to the firm's focus on the future, Tecson emphasized what he sees as another critical part of Chuhak & Tecson's culture, a focus on public service and charitable giving.

That theme started with the firm's founders, Tecson said. His father was the first Asian-American to serve on the Cook County Board and the late Tecson's background in public service also included chairing the executive article committee for the 1970 Illinois Constitutional Convention.

"That sort of set the tone ... the firm continues to have numerous attorneys here who are active in serving on boards of organizations, in making fundraising programs to raise money for charities," he said.

A few examples of Chuhak & Tecson attorneys' philanthropic efforts today include Tecson himself, who is saxophonist for a jazz combo that has held fundraising concerts for charity.

The firm's banking practice group leader, Eileen M. Sethna, recently chaired Misericordia's annual Heart of Mercy Ball, which exceeded its goal of raising more than \$1 million.

Principal Lindsey Paige Markus was recently recognized by the Jewish United Fund for her contributions to Chicago's Jewish community and principal Kristen E. Hudson was recognized last month by the Public Interest Law Initiative for her pro bono work.

From packaging items at food pantries to baking cookies at the Ronald McDonald House, Tecson said the firm's attorneys regularly go out in the community to show their commitment to helping others.

"It's part of the culture of our firm. We are grateful for the privilege of serving our community and we are committed to giving back to the community in just a multitude of ways," he said.

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