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Roetzel & Andress begins 2017 with new leadership

SHERRY KARABIN

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Akron-based Roetzel & Andress rang in 2017 with a new chairman and two new board members.

On Jan. 1 Roetzel & Andress President Robert Blackham took the reins from Chairman Jeffrey Casto.

"I plan to continue the progress and growth of the firm initiated by my predecessor Jeff Casto," said Blackham.

"My goal is to fully bring the firm into the 21st century by increasing our firm's emphasis on innovation in the delivery of service to our clients through the leveraging of technology, while never losing our focus on how we can best serve our clients in our role as their trusted advisor.

"The legal market today is a buyer's market and in order to compete we need to maintain our competitive edge by constantly striving to adhere to our historical standard of delivering the highest quality of representation to our clients, while at the same time never losing sight of the fact that we must work within their budgetary constraints," Blackham said.

Casto is continuing his role as a partner in the Business & Commercial Litigation Group, where he focuses on defending product liability lawsuits as well as handling probate and trust litigation.

"It was an honor to serve as chairman for the past five years," Casto said in a press release. "As a firm, we have strengthened the depth and diversity of legal services we offer clients in order to help them achieve their business goals. I am grateful for the opportunity to have led this great law firm, and I am confident that Bob will continue our great heritage of client service as we move into the future."

Born in Lorain, Ohio, Blackham received his bachelor's degree in political science from The Ohio State University and his juris doctor from the Cleveland-Marshall College of Law.

Blackham, who primarily handles labor and employment matters, has been at Roetzel & Andress since the early 1990s. He's the first chairman who is not based in Akron.

He previously served as partner-in-charge of the Cleveland office and as national practice group chair. He took over as president on Feb. 1 as part of a larger plan that restructured the governance of the firm, creating an elected board of directors.

The board began operating last January and is made up of seven members that are elected by the firm's shareholders. They serve staggered three-year terms. Previously an advisory group provided advice and guidance regarding the operation of the firm.

As chairman and president, Blackham said he plans to continue Casto's efforts to grow the firm organically.

"I think it's important to hire and develop new attorneys and not just hire laterally," said Blackham. "Our firm has a long history of collegiality and a culture that is deeply rooted in client service and we are very protective of these basic principles. Developing new attorneys with an eye toward instilling those values early on in one's career will only serve to help our firm ensure that these most important attributes will continue to thrive in our organization."

While he expects to add attorneys, the physical spaces many of them will occupy will be shrinking.

"The days of large ornate offices with oak paneling and wasted space are quickly becoming a thing of the past," he said. "I would much rather utilize the firm's resources to continue to upgrade our technology and invest in the professional development of our lawyers. Our clients and our ability to serve them is what is the most important factor, not the size of a lawyer's individual office space.

"We have reduced the square footage of our offices in Akron, Cleveland and Naples," said Blackham. "We are doing the same in Toledo this year as well as in Orlando while at the same time maintaining and/or increasing our attorney numbers in all of those offices.

"Chicago has remained the same but we will be looking at new space in 2018 and will likewise look to reduce the square footage while increasing attorney numbers there."

Blackham said the firm will be moving its Columbus office to a more efficient space at the Huntington Center in July or early August.

In addition to transitioning the role of chairman, the board of directors voted to elect Denise Hasbrook, partner-in-charge of the Toledo office, and Ronald Kopp, administrative partner, to three-year terms.

Kopp joined the firm in 1979 shortly after receiving his juris doctor from The Ohio State University Moritz College of Law.

Located in the Akron office, he's a member of the Business Litigation Practice Group.

He currently serves as president of the Ohio State Bar Association and is a past president of the Akron Bar Association. Kopp is also immediate past board chair of Leadership Akron.

"My goal as board member is to reinforce the firm's collaborative culture and collegial atmosphere," said Kopp. "As an attorney who has spent his entire career at Roetzel & Andress I understand that one of the things making the firm so special is the cooperation between practice groups and attorneys.

"I believe this spirit of collaboration is one of the keys to the firm's success and I want to convey this to the board and keep this spirit alive for future attorneys who choose to make their careers at Roetzel & Andress."

Hasbrook focuses her practice on shareholder disputes, business litigation and represents employers in all types of issues.

Born in Livonia, Michigan, Hasbrook received her bachelor's degree in speech therapy from The University of Toledo and her juris doctor from The University of Toledo College of Law.

She began her career as a law clerk in the Lucas County Common Pleas Court. She joined Roetzel & Andress in 1998, after practicing in the litigation division of The Toledo Edison Company for about 15 years.

"Roetzel has a long history of stable, practical leadership that first and foremost focuses on providing the best possible service to our clients," said Hasbrook. "My goal as a board member is to continue this tradition of inclusive leadership to promote creative solutions to today's challenges."

Continuing their terms as board members are Lewis E. Adkins Jr., a partner in the Cleveland office and manager of the Public Law, Regulatory and Finance Practice Group; David P. Barker, a partner in the Orlando office who focuses on real estate, banking and finance; Brian J. Moore, partner-in-charge in Akron and manager of the Real Estate, Banking and Finance Practice Group; Mark J. Price, a partner in the Naples office, who handles real estate, banking and finance, and Douglas E. Spiker, partner-in-charge of the Cleveland office and manager of the Employment Services Practice Group.

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