

# GALLAGHER, EVELIUS & JONES LLP







# Q&A with Thomas C. Dame, Managing Partner

Tom Dame developed an interest in law in the 1980s as a college intern at the Maryland General Assembly where he was assigned to committee work and watched state lawmakers hammer out legislation. He joined the Baltimore law firm Gallagher Evelius & Jones LLP after graduating from the University of Maryland Francis King Carey School of Law in 1990. Mr. Dame practices in health law and litigation and he was elected the firm's managing partner in 2018.

**AS 2019 ARRIVED**, the *Maryland Bar Journal* sat down with Tom to talk about his first-year experience as an elected managing partner and the historic firm's strategy for the future.

➔ **What have been the key learnings for you this first year as managing partner?**

Among the most important lessons is that few desired results happen by accident. It is important for a leader to be vigilant about noticing what's going on around him or her and to be thoughtful about making assumptions. Deep listening is essential to noticing what's going on. It's important to listen to understand a person's perspective and not just listen to respond.

➔ **How did you and your partners reach a new leadership structure?**

As we were approaching that transition in leadership we decided it was a good time to undertake a full-blown strategic planning process, which included a new firm-governance structure. We didn't take any shortcuts. It was a well-planned, thorough, and thoughtful year-long process. We included virtually everybody in the firm in some way, lawyers, and staff. It was, in the end, a reaffirmation of our values, our culture, and the direction of the firm. I have to say, I don't know many people who get excited about the prospect of strategic planning, but our people – once they got into it – were energized.

➔ **Where do you start when developing a strategy for a firm like Gallagher?**

The first piece was to take a look at the history of the firm, where we have come from, up until now. We worked with Rick Berndt, who as our managing partner for more than 40 years knows, as you can imagine, a lot of the history of the firm.

Next, we assessed the current state of the firm. Most importantly, we interviewed a number of clients to understand their experience of the firm. We engaged an outside consultant to help us to analyze our market and look at our financial performance. We reviewed and assessed our culture and values through a half-day session. With all of this, we developed an assessment of where we are today. Our conclusion was that we have a strong foundation and are well-positioned for the future.

The next piece was to develop a vision statement, which is a road map to where we want to be in three years, the near future of the firm. We did that through a collaborative process. We involved everybody who was part of the planning committee, about 18 people, and we worked through about a dozen drafts of a vision statement. The idea was to come up with a very specific, detailed description of what it will be like at Gallagher three years from now, and then that vision became the goal line.

The firm has a strong collaborative culture, which has been an advantage in attracting top talent.

Photo courtesy Tracey Brown, Papercamera Photography



## ▶ HEALTHCARE LAW WHITE PAPER

Attorneys from Gallagher, Evelius & Jones LLP, including, James C. Buck, Carl S. Jean-Baptiste, Mallory M. Regenbogen, and Alison J. Best, have joined with the MSBA to produce new content on Healthcare Law. A CLE along with a new white paper related to handling matters with Business Associates are available now on MSBA.org.



### ➔ What is that vision?

The vision addresses a number of components of the firm. It's broad and covers culture, client service, leadership, public service, recruitment of talent, diversity, and inclusion. It describes what we will look like on all of those topics. The vision statement is a way to hold us accountable for staying with the strategic plan. At the end of 2020, we would like the vision statement to match reality. The final step of our process was to develop and prioritize goals that will help us achieve our vision.

### ➔ Diversity is a challenge these days in the legal profession. Where is the firm on diversity and where do you want to be?

Today, of our 50 lawyers, about one-third are women and three are African-American. Improving diversity and inclusion in a variety of forms, not just gender and race, is an important strategic goal for us. One of our partners, Camille Parker, is leading our effort as the chair of our diversity and inclusion committee, which includes lawyers and staff. She has made good progress by, among other things, building stronger relationships for us at the two Baltimore-based law schools and other schools in the region.

We have begun an internal education program on diversity topics. We had a firm-wide presentation on implicit bias and how that affects everything we do, including recruiting and retention of talent.



Tom Dame, managing partner of Gallagher Evelius & Jones, discusses his first-year experience as elected managing partner of the firm.

*Photo courtesy of Tracey Brown, Papercamera Photography*

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➔ **When you talk about community involvement, what does that look like now for the firm and where would you expect it to be in 2020?**

As lawyers, we know it's a privilege to have a license to practice law, and with it comes a responsibility to give back to the community. Virtually all of our lawyers are involved in some form of community service. We now have a firm committee, chaired by Ward Coe, that is charged with promoting our involvement in pro bono and community service.

One of the charges of this group is to look for public service opportunities that the entire firm can participate in, not just opportunities for individual lawyers, but something that groups of lawyers, if not the entire firm, can get behind. The plight of immigrants is a big issue today for obvious reasons and that's something we have been looking at to see how we can help.

➔ **How does a firm like Gallagher with deep roots in the City of Baltimore and an impressive client list of local institutions sustain those connections while building a modern, competitive firm into the future?**

Having deep local roots is a real strength of our firm. We have decades-long relationships with our clients because they know they can count on us in every way. We are privileged to have those relationships. We worked hard to get them and we are working hard to preserve them in the future.

There will always be a demand for the types of services we provide. We're essentially a full-service firm for regional institutions. We do have some national practices, such as our tax credit and renewable energy practices. Our litigation practice sometimes handles cases outside of our region. But many of our practices – including health care, education, non-profit, real estate – are really focused on Maryland and the surrounding region.

We are able to compete with the larger firms even as they merge and grow, because our distinctive culture and our great client base enables us to attract the same talent they are getting, if not better talent.

➔ **What would be your greatest hope and expectation for the firm and its progress and development over the next four years?**

The most important thing is that we retain and expand the client base that we have and we continue to provide high-quality services to those clients and that we continue to attract and retain clients who we admire and who are contributing to the community. It's a very satisfying law practice when you can say that about your clients.

I would like us to advance our culture, not just maintain it. We have had a very strong culture and it has been a draw for us in bringing talent to the firm. I would like our people to feel even more engaged in the firm and with one another, even more supportive of one another. We try to eliminate internal competition to be as effective as possible for our clients.

We hope and expect that each lawyer who joins the firm will become a partner. We make partnership decisions based on merit of the individual. Our recruiting and our compensation systems are designed to promote teamwork. This incentivizes our people to work together and to rise and fall together. I would like our people to continue to thrive in an environment that is collegial and team-based, and that they will continue to feel involved in the affairs and direction of the firm. When people feel ownership, they are much more motivated to serve clients and be supportive of one another.

**WEB EXTRAS**



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