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New Jersey – Law Firms

Epstein Becker & Green's New Jersey Office: Ready For Takeoff

The Editor interviews Carmine A. Iannaccone, Member, Epstein Becker & Green, P.C., Newark.

Editor: Mr. Iannaccone, would you tell our readers something about your professional experience?

Iannaccone: I was born and raised in New Jersey. Following undergraduate studies at Villanova University, I attended Tulane University School of Law in New Orleans. Tulane was a wonderful experience, and I came to appreciate a very different culture than I was used to, having grown up in the Northeast. At Tulane I was an editor on the law review and graduated in 1977 in the top 10 percent of my class, and that gave me some choices when I came to interview for a job. I wanted to return to New Jersey, and I ultimately joined Stryker, Tams & Dill in the fall of 1977. It was an excellent choice because, at the time, Stryker was one of the largest firms in the state with an incomparable list of *Fortune* 500 clients. I left Stryker in 1986 to head Hanocho Weisman's labor and employment practice.

Editor: How did you come to EBG? What were the things that attracted you to the firm?

Iannaccone: In the summer of 1998, while a partner at Hanocho Weisman, I received an unsolicited call from a recruiter asking if I was interested in managing the New Jersey office of a national firm. That firm was not EBG, but the call caused me to consider other opportunities. My practice had grown at Hanocho, but I had reached a plateau since I could not service my clients outside of New Jersey. I was also running into conflicts

with other clients that the firm represented. Given these factors, I concluded that joining a firm with a national platform would allow me to diversify my practice by increasing its geographical reach.

Following a number of interviews, I came to focus on EBG because of the firm's national reputation in two areas of practice, labor and employment and healthcare and life sciences. While the firm has developed a particularly strong labor and employment brand, it has also worked to develop additional core practice groups such as business law, litigation and real estate. That differentiated it from the boutique firms engaged only in labor and employment, and it offered me an opportunity to serve my clients in a wide range of practice areas. In addition, I was greatly impressed by the quality of people that I met during the interview process. The firm's overall leadership — and Steve Epstein, Jeff Becker and Ron Green in particular — has created an extremely collegial firm culture, and I found that very attractive.

In light of the number of corporate headquarters located in New Jersey, EBG's office here has a great deal of strategic importance to the firm. And that importance has increased since my arrival in December 1998. When I joined, there were two partners and four associates in the employment area. Today we have 35 lawyers and at least an equal number of staff.

Editor: Please tell us about your practice. How has it evolved over the course of your career?



Carmine A. Iannaccone

Iannaccone: I would say that the practice of law is completely different today from what it was when I began practicing 30 years ago. The community of practitioners was smaller then, and there was more in the way of professionalism and trust then. On the other hand, we are held to a much higher degree of accountability today, and I think that is good for the profession. Similarly, the advent of technology — cell phones, e-mail, Blackberries — has made us available to our clients any time, day or night offering personal service instantaneously. There are occasions when that is a burden, but overall it has been good for the profession.

I was very fortunate to be able to get courtroom and even jury trial experience at a very early point in my career. I think that kind of experience is very difficult for young associates to come by today.

I have 25 reported decisions, and I take a great deal of pride in that because it reflects a career that has had an impact on the development of the law dealing with some of the complex issues that arise in the labor and employment law arena. I see that legacy as a real high point in my career. Another high point is guiding and working with young associates as they develop and advance in their practice. Some of them have become truly great lawyers and it has been rewarding to play a part in their success.

There have been difficult moments, to be sure. The challenges have never come in the form of trying cases or dealing with clients but rather relate to the many administrative responsibilities and issues that arise for a firm of our size. When I became managing partner of this office, I assumed responsibility for a great many people, for their careers and livelihoods. I have always looked upon that as a very serious responsibility.

Please email the interviewee at ciannaccone@ebglaw.com with questions about this interview.

Editor: Can you tell us something about the development of the employment and labor practice at EBG?

Iannaccone: The firm was founded more than four decades ago by Jeff Becker and Steve Epstein, who had the foresight to build a firm that specialized in healthcare law. That part of the firm now is regarded as one of the finest healthcare and life sciences practice in the country. Shortly thereafter Ron Green joined the firm, and he has been enormously successful in marketing the labor and employment law practice. The three founders are responsible for developing the firm's national reputation, while promoting a culture of sharing and mutual support. Today we have nearly 170 labor and employment lawyers providing a range of services from class action employment litigation to traditional labor management relations counseling to ADA, FMLA, FSLA, and OSHA counseling and litigation defense – an entire gamut of services.

After starting out in New York and Washington, the firm has developed a national footprint. We are in all the places where we think we need to be to optimize client services. Our goal has been to have the five core practices in each of our national offices and to complement them in a measured way as the firm diversifies and evolves into more of a full-service firm. Today we are in 11 cities across the country, and in most of them we are able to offer services to our clients well beyond our traditional core specialties.

Editor: How does the Newark office fit into this pattern?

Iannaccone: We have a strong labor and employment practice, a healthcare and life sciences practice, and, over the past three years we have developed a commercial litigation capability with an emphasis on corporate compliance and intellectual property. As the firm grows and diversifies, I see our commercial litigation practice becoming branded along the lines of what has occurred in the other two areas.

Editor: As you know, our publication is directed at general counsel and the members of corporate legal departments. Are there specific issues that we should be bringing to the attention of our readers?

Iannaccone: There have been some dramatic changes in the way we do business since the Enron and Worldcom corporate scandals. If corporate America is to regain the confidence, trust and esteem of the public, it is essential that corporate governance –

and, in particular, corporate compliance – be coordinated with human resources management. These are not mutually exclusive undertakings in the post-Enron world. Business ethics compliance and HR management must be in step: the obligation to meet the standards of good corporate citizenship must be coordinated to insure protection of legitimate employee rights.

Another issue for corporate counsel has to do with the degree to which technology has placed the company's proprietary information at risk. Competitors, disaffected employees, even perfect strangers are able to gain information about our companies, our employees and even our personal lives. It is relatively easy to hack into and manipulate technology to the company's detriment. We spend considerable time working with clients to ensure that the appropriate safeguards are in place to protect their business assets, while at the same time ensuring that employee rights are protected.

Editor: You have also written about labor and employment arbitration. Would you tell us about the role that ADR is assuming in this area?

Iannaccone: Over the past 15 years employers and employees have come to see the wisdom of entering into voluntary agreements to settle disputes without recourse to the courts. And the courts are enforcing such agreements provided they ensure due process. Litigation is both expensive and distracting. ADR offers a way in which to handle these disputes quickly and at much less expense. ADR has come of age in the last decade or so.

Editor: How does the Newark office connect to other EBG offices?

Iannaccone: EBG is built on a culture of sharing. Our Newark office exchanges personnel with the New York office on a regular basis. If a New Jersey-based client calls me with an issue in California, I am in a position to immediately staff the matter with lawyers familiar with the intricacies of California law. Technology permits us to offer our clients a national network of lawyers in all of our practice areas instantaneously. By the same token, our office is on call to support the undertakings of other offices. I am in Atlanta, Chicago, Los Angeles and San Francisco on a regular basis. Through technology, we are constantly sharing information about developments in the law, our client needs and firm administration. We also regularly update our clients with the latest developments through our electronic

client alerts.

Editor: What about the future? Where would you like the Newark office to be in, say, five years?

Iannaccone: I believe we are on the right track. Over the past few years we have made some decisions that have put us in a position to grow the office. I suspect that we will double in size in the next five years, and our emphasis will be in areas other than labor and employment and healthcare and life sciences. We have made excellent progress in commercial litigation, and we are also doing well with respect to IP. Jim Flynn heads our IP practice in Newark and Hervé Gouraige has a national reputation as a commercial litigator. The challenge, of course, is to bring in the right people, those with the requisite expertise and an affinity for our firm culture. Recently we added Paul Friedman, an ERISA litigator whom I have known for many years. Paul fits in very well with Joan Disler and her group, and he exemplifies what we are looking for in our growth plans. Another practice area where I would like to see growth is business law. The firm has a strong business presence in Atlanta, Chicago, Dallas, Houston and New York, and it would help the Newark office and the firm overall if we had such a presence here as well.

Editor: Any thoughts of opening up an overseas offices?

Iannaccone: We regularly travel to Europe and Asia to speak to companies which transact business in the United States and otherwise have business interests here. Ron Green has been to Japan each year for the past 15 years, and over the past five years we have been invited to speak in China and Korea.

We are also the founding member of the International Lawyers Network, a worldwide confederation of high-quality, full-service law firms. This is a joint cooperative effort that gives us the ability to advise our clients with respect to the selection of overseas counsel. Currently the network's reach extends to 75 countries on six continents. Our participation in the network enables us to be on the receiving end of referrals from law firms all across the world. It also permits us to work with top-of-the-line foreign lawyers on complicated international matters. In light of what we have in place to address our clients' international needs, I do not see us opening an office abroad in the immediate future, but one of the firm's greatest attributes is to react swiftly and decisively if an opportunity presents itself.