

# Chicago Daily Law Bulletin®

Volume 159, No. 95

## Going to new heights

Bryce shepherds firm's growth from two to 30 attorneys in 12 years

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When Geoffrey A. Bryce and another lawyer started their law firm a dozen years ago, it consisted of just the two men.

Now Bryce, Downey & Lenkov LLC has 30 lawyers and two offices, including one in Chicago and another in Crown Point, Ind. Two lawyers who are of counsel with the firm work in Memphis and Atlanta, respectively, while another lawyer is of counsel here.

The firm concentrates on commercial matters — both transactional and litigation — along with construction cases, general insurance defense litigation, intellectual property, employment, and workers' compensation defense.

Bryce, an Ohio native, worked in private industry after receiving his undergraduate degree. He became interested in the legal profession while taking a business law class as an undergraduate at the University of Toledo.

He earned a master's degree in taxation from DePaul University in 1976. He later enrolled in evening classes at The John Marshall Law School, graduating in 1981.

Bryce joined the firm that was known as Rooks, Pitts & Poust as an associate after he previously worked there as a paralegal. He was the first person at the firm to work his way up from paralegal to lawyer.

Within a one-week period after he became an Illinois lawyer, his daughter was born after his wife spent 48 hours in labor.

Shortly after the birth of the first of their two children, he went to court and argued a highly contested motion.

"I remember being absolutely exhausted, tired and worn out," he said.

He later became a partner with Rooks, Pitts and remained there until starting his own firm in 2001.

Bryce, the firm's managing capital partner, focuses his practice on construction cases, products liability and insurance coverage disputes.

He spoke to the Daily Law Bulletin about the firm's growth, his management style and his hobby that involves heights.

**Law Bulletin:** What do you consider your main accomplishments as the firm's managing member?

**Bryce:** I would say taking the firm from two guys and a moving truck to 30 lawyers in 12 years with two offices.

**LB:** Describe your leadership and management style.

**Bryce:** Clearly identifying where the firm needs to go to be better and building consensus among the five equity partners to accomplish that. One of my management philosophies is that we don't run a gulf.

**LB:** What do you believe makes you an effective manager?

**Bryce:** I am approachable, for one thing. I would say I can effectively deal with people and, because of my accounting and tax background, I'm good at managing money and numbers. And I have the ability of having a vision of what the next step needs to be for the firm.



Geoffrey A. Bryce — managing capital member of Bryce, Downey & Lenkov LLC — rappelled down the glass wall of the 27-story Wit Hotel last year to raise money for the Respiratory Health Association of Metropolitan Chicago. The law firm also has sponsored Race Judicata and Hustle Up the Hancock.

**LB:** What is that next step?

**Bryce:** The next step of the firm is to grow our respective practice areas.

**LB:** What are your plans and goals for the firm?

**Bryce:** The plan and the goal is to improve our overall efficiency, not only in terms of administrative processes, but in the training, teaching and professional development of our lawyers. We also want to identify and target new practice areas that the firm might engage. We have actually started a burgeoning entertainment law practice and I think that's an area we can grow into.

**LB:** What are the main challenges facing the firm?

**Bryce:** I think one of the challenges is recruiting qualified attorneys and developing qualified

### Geoffrey A. Bryce

*Bryce, Downey & Lenkov LLC  
managing capital member*

- **Location:** Chicago
- **Size:** \$7 million total revenue in 2012
- **Lawyers:** 30
- **Age:** 63
- **Law school:** The John Marshall Law School, 1981
- **Interests:** Running, weightlifting, bicycle riding, in-line skating

attorneys into solid contributors. I would also say surviving and thriving in a competitive marketplace is a challenge.

**LB:** How do you plan to face those challenges?

**Bryce:** By instituting more and

better training for our attorneys. It's not only the professional development. It's equally important to train the attorneys in business skills. You want to increase the associates' legal business abilities, including knowing the economics that go into case management.

**LB:** How much time do you spend on firm management issues versus client matters?

**Bryce:** Some years it's as low as 400 hours. This year it's closer to 700 hours. We added about 3,500 square feet to our space (at 200 N. LaSalle St.) We had a high-tech conference room put together. We

upgraded our 401(k) plan. We added some new folks. We're in the process of going through a computer conversion from one case management platform to another.

**LB:** How do you balance your management and client responsibilities?

**Bryce:** I rank what needs to be done and when it needs to be done and client matters always take precedence over everything else. If it comes down to there being a lot of client demands or lots of firm demands, you just work longer that week.

Fortunately, with technology, you don't have to be in the office to do that. We also have very good staff people and partners who can help out with management or client matters.

**LB:** What do you consider the firm's strength?

**Bryce:** I would say it's people and their respective skill sets.

**LB:** What are areas you want to see the firm become stronger in?

**Bryce:** What I would like to see is all areas of the firm expand and grow and maintain a solid level of profitability.

**LB:** How many lawyers did the

firm add last year and what are the plans for hiring additional lawyers this year?

**Bryce:** We added four lawyers, three income partners and one associate in 2012. We will probably add one associate by the end of the year.

**LB:** What is an interesting fact about you that others don't know?

**Bryce:** My hobby was climbing mountains (including Mount Rainier in the state of Washington). I did that in my youth. The last time I was on a hill was about four years ago with my son in Wyoming.