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Thompson Coburn's Tom Minogue on his chairmanship, the future and downtown St. Louis

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Tom Minogue's family had little money — his dad was disabled after World II, when he was hit by a kamikaze pilot, and his mom eventually became disabled, too. He paid his way through college and law school by teaching tennis on public courts in North County, becoming the first graduate of the University of Missouri - St. Louis to earn a law degree at Harvard University.

He joined Thompson Coburn — then Thompson & Mitchell — in 1979 and has served as its chairman almost 18 years.

During his tenure, the firm has become the largest in St. Louis, with 375 lawyers, and more than \$200 million in revenue. Other offices are in Washington, D.C., Chicago, Los Angeles and Belleville.

Last fall, Thompson Coburn, the largest tenant at One U.S. Bank Plaza and Minogue's place of work for his entire career, renewed its lease into 2026, keeping more than 500 jobs downtown.

Minogue, 63, talked about the firm, his tenure, the industry, plans for the future, and more.

Is it hard to lead a law firm for so long? It's fun. Lawyers are enjoyable people, interested in their careers, focused on their clients, outgoing, admittedly skeptical. If it wasn't fun, I wouldn't have stayed in it so long.

What's the key? You have to be receptive to change in any business environment. If you're not, you'll get left behind. The biggest changes have been in technology and diversification of the profession. Both are positive, and true of all segments of the business world.

What are your plans for succession? We have a five-member executive committee and 15 directors, and have intentionally changed two-thirds of the membership of both to set up



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Tom Minogue of Thompson Coburn

succession behind me. We have mandatory retirement from management at age 67, so the longest I will be chairman is four more years.

What are your financial goals for Thompson Coburn? We do well here, and we are completely debt free. We have met our budget for 27 consecutive years, which means partners expecting to make X dollars have made X-plus dollars for 27 consecutive years. We view financial goals as derivative of other things: our relationships with clients and, hand-in-hand, people achieving their career goals at the firm. Do we have a dollar target? The answer is no.

What has given you satisfaction? We created the market leader in our headquarters city, one of the 20 largest markets in the U.S. That's a cool thing.

Talk about the firm's contributions to downtown. Ten years ago, we made a decision to stay downtown after surveying all of our people. The junior people, in particular, wanted us to stay in the vibrancy of an urban environment. Everybody outside of St. Louis also wanted us to stay downtown, with the Arch and Busch Stadium. If you are the market leader, that's how you should present yourself to the world. U.S. Bank and the Missouri Development Authority helped us convert the abandoned St. Louis Centre mall into parking for our people. All of the Washington Avenue retail — the MX, Robust, Pi Pizzeria, the Blues Museum — none of that would have been there if we didn't stay downtown. All of this because of 300 parking spaces.

What is the best trend in law? Mobile technology. Clients are all about responsiveness and staying in touch. When I leave the office, I can take the tablet with me.

What is the most worrisome trend? The ability to get the training for more junior lawyers in an era of technology. Fewer cases go to trial. It's a different teaching process. They have to learn from the editing.

What is St. Louis' greatest asset? It may be a cliché, but it's true: the advantages of a larger metro area without the disadvantages.

What is the biggest change it needs to make? Fewer governmental entities. Merge the city and county. There is no No. 2.

What advice do you have for a young grad starting a career? I give it to all of our new associates: Do your best work on everything. Do it on time. Treat your subordinates as you want to be treated. Take all of your vacation.

What person, living or dead, would you like to have dinner with? Rod Laver because he was the idol of everybody who started playing tennis when I did.

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