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## Brinks Hofer's new leader intends to increase firm's size, bottom line

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James R. Sobieraj spent part of his initial week as the leader of Brinks Hofer Gilson & Lione telling the firm's employees about his perceptions of the intellectual property boutique.

On Jan. 1, Sobieraj replaced Gary M. Ropski, another Brinks Hofer partner, as the firm's president.

For about the last year, Sobieraj "worked closely with Gary Ropski as president and that prepared me well," he said.

Brinks Hofer started in 1917 as a two-member patent law firm known as Wilkinson & Huxley. Brinks Hofer now consists of about 140 lawyers, patent agents and scientific advisers working in six U.S. offices. About two thirds of Brinks Hofer's approximately 300 total employees work in the Chicago office, Sobieraj said.

Between Wednesday and Friday, Sobieraj met with the firm's employees in groups at the Chicago office and via video conference with those in other office locations in Washington, D.C., Research Triangle Park, N.C., Salt Lake City, Indianapolis and Ann Arbor, Mich.

Sobieraj told Brinks Hofer lawyers and other employees he believes "we're in the right market segment, which is IP. We have the right platform, which is a full-service IP boutique and we have the right people because we have a deep roster of experts in all aspects of IP and in all fields of technology and science."

Brinks Hofer is the largest law firm dedicated to IP between Southern California and Washington, D.C., Sobieraj said.

"My vision is to grow in stature, size and profitability as one of the premier IP boutiques in the United States," Sobieraj said.

Brinks Hofer plans to continue hiring additional lawyers as its business grows, he said. The firm recently hired five lawyers at several of its offices, including in Chicago and Washington.

Sobieraj also plans to reaffirm Brinks Hofer's commitment to helping clients



James R. Sobieraj

achieve their legal and business objectives.

Ropski said he and Sobieraj worked together during 2011 to ensure a smooth transition in Brinks Hofer's leadership.

"So, I know (Sobieraj) is going to be a strong, capable, dynamic leader with a vision for the firm, which will bring it much success for the next four years of his term and beyond," said Ropski, who has returned to representing clients full-time at Brinks Hofer.

The uncertain economy remains a main challenge for Brinks Hofer and other law firms because corporate legal budgets continue shrinking, which results in increased competition for business, Sobieraj said.

As Brinks Hofer's new president, Sobieraj expects to manage "a lot of competing demands for my time from both clients and members of the firm," he said.

Sobieraj plans to spend about half his time working on firm matters and the remainder practicing law.

Sobieraj, 54, is a Detroit native who received his bachelor's degree in electrical engineering magna cum laude from the

University of Michigan in 1979.

While an undergraduate, Sobieraj became interested in pursuing a legal career. He enrolled at the University of Michigan Law School and graduated from there in 1982.

One of Sobieraj's law professors suggested that he interview with the Brinks Hofer firm because it had the best patent litigation practice in the Midwest, Sobieraj said.

Brinks Hofer hired Sobieraj in late 1982 and he has remained there since.

Throughout his career, Sobieraj has handled all aspects of IP litigation, including patents. He also writes patents and counsels clients.

Among Sobieraj's clients are Amway, a leader in the direct selling industry. Sobieraj recently also started handling commercial litigation for Amway.

Michael A. Mohr, vice president and general counsel for Alticor Inc., the holding company for Amway, has worked with Sobieraj on litigation.

Sobieraj "is drawn to things that I think he's curious about and things that will help him do a better job for his client," Mohr said.

Sobieraj has evolved as more of a general adviser to Amway, rather than focusing only on IP matters, Mohr said.

"We really do trust his judgment on enterprise issues," Mohr said.

Mohr said that if Sobieraj "promulgates the client-service model from him and his team, I think (Brinks Hofer) will only grow."

Sobieraj is a past president of the Licensing Executives Society (U.S.A. and Canada) Inc. and held the same position with the Intellectual Property Law Association of Chicago. Sobieraj currently serves as treasurer of Licensing Executives Society International and is a member of the Richard Linn American Inn of Court.

Sobieraj and his wife, Jacquelyn, an architect, are the parents of two daughters. In his free time, Sobieraj enjoys skiing in the winter and playing golf in warmer weather.

"My skiing and golf game keep me humble and remind me to stay vigilant with my day job," Sobieraj said.