

Leading revitalization

Thompson Hine partner drives change

By Brooke Bilyj

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TOM COYNE

Partner, real estate practice group leader, Thompson Hine

When Tom Coyne joined the law firm Thompson Hine & Flory (now Thompson Hine LLP) in 1985, he had every expectation he would remain there his entire career. After some 37 years, that expectation has been borne out.

"Thompson Hine had the right mix of the highest standards of professionalism, excellence, collegiality and civic engagement that I was looking for in a law firm," Coyne remarked. Since that time, Coyne has handled billions of dollars in real estate transactions throughout the country and across the globe — and now he's taking a renewed interest in revitalizing Cleveland's downtown.

As the son of John Coyne, co-owner of the former Coyne-Kangesser Parking Company (now operated by ABM), Coyne has real estate in his blood. He worked odd jobs in the parking lot business since he was 10 years old, from maintenance and construction to enforcement and trash removal.

"Back in the 1970s," Coyne said, "I cleaned up a lot of garbage off the parking lots, and my brother and I spent most Mondays going back and forth between the lots and the city dump. From that experience, I think I know every alley, nook and cranny in the city, as we managed over 35 properties back then."

Last month, Coyne was elected chair of the Downtown Cleveland Improvement Corporation (DCIC), an organization with a \$5 million budget comprising property owners who pay special property assessments to fund enhanced services in the Downtown Cleveland

Improvement District and to support select economic development and initiatives. Coyne also serves on the strategic planning committee that will realign the DCIC and the Downtown Cleveland Alliance (DCA) in accordance with best practices in other major U.S. cities.

DCA president and CEO Michael Deemer said of Coyne, "Tom lends an experienced, balanced and resolute voice to our organizations." Coyne expressed that the DCIC is redoubling its efforts on the Ambassador Program through a series of recent measures designed to accelerate downtown Cleveland's recovery from the pandemic.

"We are also working in close partnership with the Cleveland police department and social service organizations to coordinate our efforts," Coyne commented, "including a focus on crime and homelessness." Coyne notes that "the health of our downtown is critical to our region, and we need to reinvest in our downtown if we are committed to reestablishing Cleveland as a vibrant city. Achieving a safe and welcoming environment is a critical part of this equation."

"It's rewarding to drive through any part of town and see projects that I've touched, including office and hotel (Key Center), retail/historic renovation (the Old Arcade and Heinen's in the former Cleveland Trust), gaming (casino in the old Higbee's), industrial (former U.S. Steel factories), cultural (MOCA at University Circle), and further out, conservation (excess Blossom lands)," Coyne said. "I take great pride in our city, but we have significant untapped potential that we need to realize."

Coyne previously served as board chair for Cleveland Neighborhood Progress, a leading local community development organization, and board chair for Family Transitional Housing Inc., an organization that helped homeless women with children find housing and reintegrate into society. Last year, he also joined the board of EDWINS Leadership and Restaurant Institute, which provides hospitality training for formerly incarcerated adults in Cleveland.

Coyne has served as the national chair of the Real Estate practice group at Thompson Hine for over 20 years, where he has grown the practice from 20 to 50 members.

Mario Suarez, a New York partner at Thompson Hine who has worked with Coyne for decades, shared that Coyne is an exceptional and selfless leader with a deep understanding of real estate law and a unique ability to craft simple solutions to complex legal challenges. "His energy and drive are contagious," said Suarez.

One of Coyne's most recent projects involved a \$650 million development of a new groundbreaking Pratt & Whitney engine parts manufacturing plant in Asheville, NC. Coyne represented Pratt & Whitney in negotiation with Biltmore Farms LLC (and the Vanderbilt/Cecil family) for more than four years to the project's completion. Anita Stone, vice president and counsel at Pratt & Whitney, based in Farmington, CT, noted that this was a once-in-a-career type project for both her and the company and that Coyne's leadership was invaluable.

"Our internal business unit clients don't end up knowing many law firms or lawyers, but they all know Tom Coyne and love him as much as I do," Stone said. "He's not only a trusted real estate law adviser, he's also a true business partner. Honestly, I consider Tom to be not only our national real estate attorney of choice, but also a mentor to me and a friend."

Closer to home, Ed Schwartz, principal of ORG Portfolio Management in Cleveland, stated that Coyne has been invaluable to the growth of their business. He continued, "In addition to being an exceptional attorney, Tom has become a trusted business adviser." Schwartz expressed that "Tom has an extraordinary network of relationships to bring parts together and get deals done."

Deborah Z. Read, Thompson Hine's managing partner, praised Coyne's nationally recognized practice. "Tom is a tremendous asset to our business community. As a leader in key community organizations, Tom continues to help drive transformational change in Cleveland."

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