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Plunkett & Cooney a success in expansion

By [Robert Ankeny](#)

Plunkett & Cooney P.C. is a midsize law firm that has successfully added practice areas and expanded its geographic reach in recent years.

Founded in 1913, it was long considered primarily an insurance defense firm, said president and CEO Henry Cooney; and although that has changed, the old image was hard to shake.

Headquartered in Bloomfield Hills, the firm has 148 lawyers, with satellite offices from Marquette to Columbus, Ohio, which include Detroit, East Lansing, Flint, Grand Rapids and Kalamazoo.

Fifteen to 20 years ago, Cooney said, the firm probably got about 85 percent of its annual revenue from traditional insurance defense work in areas such as personal injury and medical malpractice defense.

Now, Plunkett's general business practice brings in 40 percent or more of the firm's business. Growth in the business and commercial practice area has come in banking and general corporate work, employment and construction litigation, he said.

Plunkett's roster of clients also includes dozens of Michigan cities, townships and villages and the Ann Arbor-based Michigan Municipal League.

On the banking front, the firm's work for Huntington Bank in the 1990s led to opening an office in the Ohio capital and also includes representation of middle market banking in foreclosure and bankruptcy for **Fifth Third, National City, Charter One** and **Flagstar** banks.

Other areas where Plunkett's practices have grown, he said, include real estate, the health and elder care industries and labor and employment law

"We've tried to make no growth for growth's sake," said Chairman Tony Rusciano. "Clients today are more sophisticated than they once were, and we move to meet their demands."

Like many midsize firms, Plunkett maintains its marketing efforts can create "the right result at the right price," often less than what larger firms might charge.

The Quell Group, a public relations firm based in Troy, was hired to develop a sort of "re-branding" campaign. They found some interesting similarities in internal and external surveying about Plunkett, said Joe Kirik, senior vice president at Quell.

One attribute that both Plunkett lawyers and their clients regularly agreed on in the surveys, Kirik said, was that attorneys from the firm would "go to the wall" and were "warriors for their clients."

This was a trait most saw not only during litigation in court cases but in transactions and negotiations as well, Cooney said.

In a profession that sees more and more turnover of even key staff, Plunkett's strategy has been to maintain and grow with lateral hiring and recruiting from Michigan law schools, Cooney said.

And in getting diversity of lawyers for their Southeast Michigan firm, gender has not been as big a problem as color, he said, leading the firm to recruit at predominantly black law schools such as Howard University and to develop a 10-point three-year plan with a consultant.

Robert Ankeny: (313) 446-0404; bankeny@crain.com