

Doing Well In Bad Times

**Collegial Firm with Diverse Practice Does Well in a Bad Decade
An up-and-coming associate gives his account of broad exposure
at established Long Island law firm** by Douglas W. Atkins, Esq.

As the calendar changed from 2010 to 2011, I was reflecting on how I have grown into my career as a young Long Island attorney over the last decade. In that time span, I have also witnessed the region's business and law transformation. We have seen both Democrats and Republicans win and lose. We have seen big businesses flee the island, while others have come and thrived. We are still muddling through a tough economy. Along the way, I have learned how to weather the constant storm and best serve my clients.

The attorney job market was pretty bleak when I was at Brooklyn Law School in 2003. Unfortunately for law students and recent graduates, it does not appear to have improved. The problem was and is simple: supply and demand. In the New York metro area, we have several distinguished law schools. Each of them is producing a few hundred graduates annually. In this tumultuous economy, the jobs are just not there. This has forced young lawyers to be creative: try different fields of law and try other career paths.

In law school, I had the phenomenal opportunity to be a law clerk at the firm I call home today: Forchelli, Curto, Deegan, Schwartz, Mineo, Cohn & Terrana. At the time I did not know what field of law I wished to enter, but the Forchelli firm had expert practices in a number of interesting areas, among them land use, commercial real estate, tax certiorari, litigation, corporate law and bankruptcy. I was fortunate enough to be exposed to all of them. Upon graduation, I became an associate at the firm and part of the tax certiorari department.

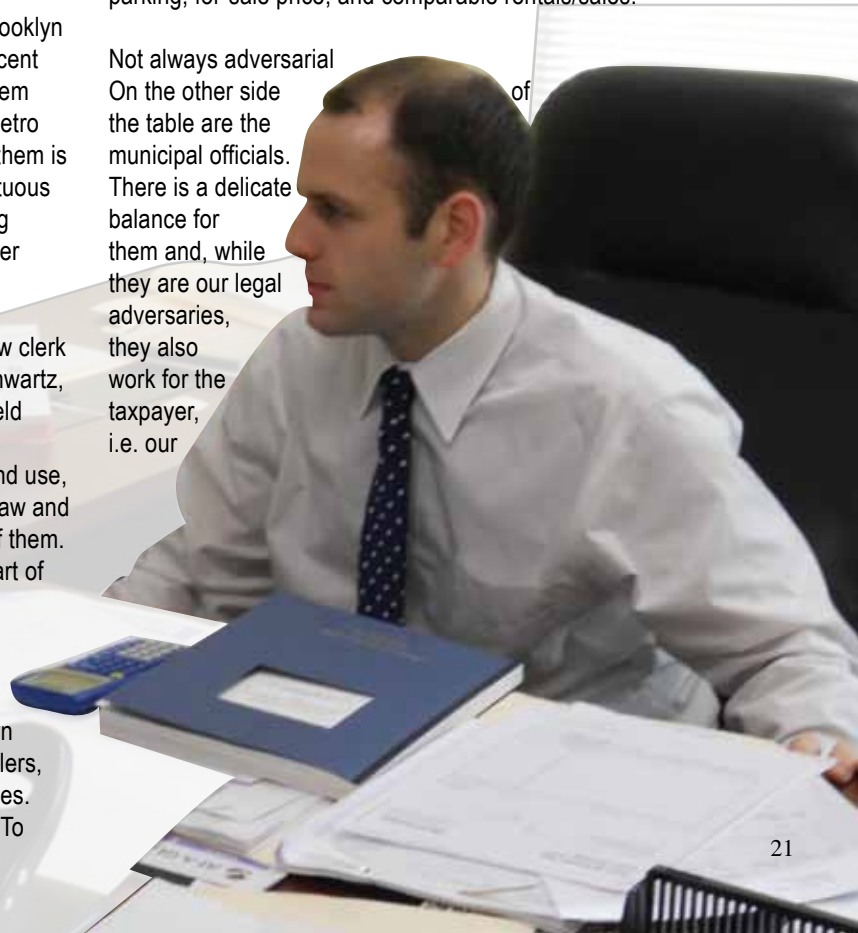
Tax certiorari law can be described as property tax refund and reduction. It is an interesting mix of commercial real estate law, litigation and property appraisal. Our clients own or rent commercial real estate. We represent national retailers, regional developers, investors and mom and pop businesses. They all have a common goal: to minimize property taxes. To

this end, we negotiate or litigate with every village, town, city and county on The Island.

In working on a case, I analyze issues which cut across various fields of law. For instance, a tax certiorari case for a multi-tenant office building will include examination into current and proposed leases, contract of sale, zoning, contamination and foreclosure/eviction problems. Since these cases hinge on a property's value, we have appraisal issues too: building income/expenses, parking, for-sale price, and comparable rentals/sales.

Not always adversarial

On the other side of the table are the municipal officials. There is a delicate balance for them and, while they are our legal adversaries, they also work for the taxpayer, i.e. our



clients. It is our hope that municipalities understand that it is to everyone's advantage to facilitate local businesses because they serve us, employ us and pay a hefty amount of tax revenue. So while some cases inevitably turn into hard fought battles, others exemplify courteous cooperation among everyone involved.

My in-office life has progressed through the years. The Forchelli firm is a vibrant place comprised of expert attorneys and top-notch support staff. But what makes it such a nice place to work is that we have a strong sense of community and friendliness. This starts at the top with the partners and works its way into every facet of the firm. We have a communal cafeteria where most of us eat together. I believe a positive atmosphere translates into higher productivity and you work better with colleagues with whom you have developed personal relationships. These principles apply in any place of business.

Be proactive to keep expenses in line and clients satisfied

I have also learned about the business demands of a law practice. Like any venture, law firms endeavor to turn a profit. Revenues must cover tremendous expenses: salaries, health benefits, office rent, phones/technology, office

supplies. A successful lawyer wants to work for clients who appreciate their work and have the ability to pay the legal bills. I have learned that to manage this you must be proactive from the moment the attorney-client relationship begins. You must consider what the client is trying to accomplish and take the most cost effective route to achieving these goals. For example, a complex and expensive lawsuit should not be pursued where a letter and a phone call might achieve the same result. You then must keep lines of communication open so the client is apprised of the work being performed.

At the Forchelli firm, we work hard and we work smart at the practice of law and the business of law. I have been here over six years and I have seen an excellent firm get bigger and better. I am unabashedly optimistic about the firm's future and my career.

Douglas W. Atkins is a member of and serves on the Tax Certiorari and Condemnation Law Committees of the Nassau and Suffolk County Bar Associations. The Huntington Township Chamber of Commerce recognized him in 2009 as one of Long Island's outstanding young professionals under the age of 30. He works for Forchelli, Curto, Deegan, Schwartz, Mineo, Cohn, & Terrana LLP, Founded in 1976, one of Long Island's most acclaimed and distinguished full service law firms.

