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Five Questions With: Stephen B. Lang

BY RHONDA MILLER

PBN STAFF WRITER

Stephen B. Lang, managing partner of Higgins, Cavanagh & Cooney, focuses his practice on the defense of transportation companies, retailers and a wide range of corporate and commercial enterprises. His experience includes insurance coverage matters and related issues. A substantial portion of his practice has involved self-insured companies or those with large self-insured retentions at every stage of trial and appellate practice.

Lang has argued numerous appeals in the Rhode Island Supreme Court and the U.S. Court of Appeals for the First Circuit. He is a court-appointed arbitrator for the Rhode Island Superior Court and maintains an AV peer review rating from Martindale Hubbell, the highest ranking available by this national publication. He is past president and member of the board of the Defense Counsel of Rhode Island.

Lang has a bachelor's degree in government from Bowdoin College and a J.D. from Syracuse University College of Law. He can be reached at slang@hcc-law.com

PBN: Higgins, Cavanagh & Cooney is an active member of ALFA International, a global legal network of 145 highly skilled law firms. Your firm has been the exclusive Rhode Island member of that organization for 25 years. What are the standards for earning that membership?

LANG: ALFA International law firms are among the best-in-class,



garnering local, state and national recognition and awards. Great care is taken in the selection process, with heavy reliance placed upon input from clients, other ALFA firms and professional organizations. Member firms' service to ALFA International clients is closely monitored and firms must consistently contribute to the network's wide range of client initiatives.

PBN: What are the major benefits to your law firm, and to your clients, of being a member of ALFA International? Do those benefits have any positive impact on Rhode Island?

LANG: ALFA International has proven to be an excellent resource for many reasons. Companies that retain Higgins, Cavanagh & Cooney have the benefit of a close relationship with a law firm that has ready access to world-wide legal support, often at rates substantially lower than the client might otherwise pay at larger law firms. Higgins, Cavanagh & Cooney benefits because we know the principals in the ALFA In-

ternational network, and we can rely on them to assist our clients.

In addition, ALFA International serves as a legal resource to national and international companies doing business in Rhode Island. Our active involvement enables our lawyers to meet and develop relationships with clients of other law firms that have the need for legal representation in the state and federal courts here.

PBN: With the still recovering economy, there is increasing pressure for in-house counsel to minimize outside counsel fees. Does being a member of ALFA International affect your firm's ability to provide cost-effective legal services?

LANG: In this highly competitive marketplace, law firms can only remain as preferred counsel to major corporate clients in and out of Rhode Island by appropriately staffing matters, by excelling at every opportunity, and by offering realistic, cost-conscious rates in each aspect of any engagement.

Our corporate clients are among the most sophisticated purchasers of legal services anywhere. Their continued allegiance, we would like to think, underscores Higgins, Cavanagh & Cooney's breadth of practice, attentiveness to their needs, and the ability to deliver exceptional value. ALFA International member law firms share that philosophy and approach as well."

PBN: A substantial portion of your practice is focused on representation of self-insured companies and insurance coverage issues in general. What are some trends or issues of increasing concern in these types of issues? What factors have impacted these issues?

LANG: One of the most significant

trends in the legal profession and within our courts is the shift toward mediation to resolve disputes. Rhode Island's successful court-sponsored mediation program is having a significant impact here. Traditionally, most cases settled on the eve of trial. With voluntary court-sponsored mediation, the travel of a case is oftentimes shorter.

As a result, trial practice has become, in some cases, much more of a discovery practice, with greater emphasis on pre-trial investigations and with much more reliance on written discovery and depositions. However, this trend is not as evident in cases involving insurance coverage litigation, where major carriers often prefer a court determination, to ensure clarity and finality in the interpretation of a particular provision or term in an insurance contract."

PBN: Your litigation practice is also focused on defense of transportation issues, national retailers and commercial clients. Are Rhode Island businesses impacted any more or less by these issues than companies in other states?

LANG: From our perspective, one area where Rhode Island businesses have been impacted more than other states is in the construction field. Until recently, Rhode Island-based construction jobs reached a near record-low. That decline is mirrored in the fewer number of claims brought against companies in the construction field. On a per capita basis, however, most companies face similar risk management challenges. Cases involving serious tractor-trailer accidents; premises, professional and product liability claims; or employment-related lawsuits know no state boundaries. ■

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