

Defined Through History

- 1879 Aikins is founded
- 1914 Sir James Aikins is elected first president of the Canadian Bar Association and is knighted that same year. Hugh Robson of Aikins is instrumental in founding the University of Manitoba Law School (Robson Hall).
- 1969 Aikins merges with Thorvaldson and Company, led by Senator G. S. Thorvaldson and becomes the largest law firm between Toronto and Vancouver.
- 1973 Brian Dickson former Aikins partner, is appointed to the Supreme Court of Canada and in 1984 is appointed Chief Justice of that Court.
- 2006 Marshall Rothstein former Aikins partner, is appointed to the Supreme Court of Canada.
- 2008 J. Guy Soubert becomes the sixth Aikins partner to be named President of the Canadian Bar Association.
- 2011 Today Aikins continues to be involved in the events that shape our region, a recent example being its representation of Tomi North Sports & Entertainment with the acquisition of an NHL franchise - The Winnipeg Jets.

AIKINS WAS THERE

PRAIRIE GOLD

Canadian Lawyer susses out the top 10 regional law firms in Saskatchewan and Manitoba.

By Robert Todd

It's not easy being a full-service regional firm in Saskatchewan and Manitoba these days. When not turning clients away because you're just too busy, you've got to field calls from national firms looking to link up and establish a presence in some of Canada's most lively economic zones. And the firms featured in *Canadian Lawyer's* list of top 10 Prairie law firms are sure to be on the top of anyone's list of targets, whether for legal services or a law firm merger. So you can just imagine how swamped they are.

"The only way we've had to adapt is by stepping up the pace," says Gordon Kuski, chairman of McDougall Gauley LLP, which has offices in Saskatoon and Regina. "We certainly have had significant demands put on our ability to handle what's been demanded of us."

National firms have certainly shown an interest in breaking into the Saskatchewan market, punctuated by Miller Thomson LLP's December 2010 merger with the 24-lawyer firm Balfour Moss LLP, a firm founded in 1895. Kuski says his firm has resisted overtures — both formal and informal — to link up with other large national firms. "We have very good connections with a lot of the

major firms, including the national firms in the major centres," remarks Kuski. "Whether or not becoming a member of one national firm would be attractive remains to be seen."

Glen Peters, managing partner of Fillmore Riley LLP in Winnipeg, notes that Manitoba has been inundated in recent years with mega-projects, such as a new international airport, the Canadian Museum for Human Rights, and a new football stadium. It's been up to lawyers at firms like Fillmore Riley to move those initiatives forward. "In our market there's always been a strong small business base, but the main difference in the last few years is the mega-projects," says Peters.

"Many individuals have been in great demand in the last period of time."

Of course, there will be those who say the booms Saskatchewan and Manitoba are experiencing are sure to turn to bust at some point. Lawyers on the ground level of the upswing would disagree. "We truly do think that the worm has turned — this is a long-term reality," says Don Wilson, Regina managing partner for MacPherson Leslie & Tyerman LLP. "There is a great opportunity for law firms that focus on the Prairies and Western Canada, and the type of legal services that are required there."

Read on to see the firms that are likely to remain front and centre as the region continues to develop.

How we did it

Canadian Lawyer asked lawyers, in-house counsel, and clients from across Canada to vote on Saskatchewan and Manitoba's top full-service, regional firms. They were asked to rank their top 10 firms from a preliminary list, with a chance to nominate a firm that was not included on the list. Respondents' rankings were based on firms' regional service coverage, client base, notable mandates, service excellence, and legal expertise. To be considered in the vote, firms were required to have offices primarily in the provinces of Saskatchewan or Manitoba, and offer a wide range of legal services. The final rankings were determined through a points system, in which firms were rewarded on a sliding scale for the number of first- to 10th-place votes received.



TOP 10

PRAIRIE REGIONAL FIRMS

1

Aikins MacAulay & Thorvaldson LLP (www.aikins.com)

Total lawyers: 90

Office: Winnipeg

Core practice areas: Securities, tax, litigation, mergers and acquisitions, labour and employment.

Key clients: CMPA, True North Sports & Entertainment Ltd., Exchange Income Corp., Artis REIT, Wellington West, Manitoba Hydro.

Notable mandates: Purchase by True North Sports & Entertainment of Atlanta Thrashers NHL franchise (Winnipeg Jets); Wellington West transfer to National Bank by way of plan of arrangement; acquisition of \$2.8 billion of properties by Artis REIT since inception including equity raises; negotiation of a 27-year power purchase agreement and a \$260-million loan transaction for Manitoba Hydro St. Joseph wind farm; acquisition by Exchange Income Corp. of Bearskin Airlines and Westower Communications.

Star alumni: James Aikins, the first president of the Canadian Bar Association; former Supreme Court of Canada chief justice Brian Dickson; Supreme Court of Canada Justice Marshall Rothstein; Federal Court of Appeal Justice Eleanor Dawson; Manitoba Court of Appeal justices Martin Freedman, Barbara Hamilton, Marc Monnin, and Richard Chartier; Manitoba's

Official Opposition leader Hugh McFadyen.

Affiliations: World Services Group

The firm: Founded by James Aikins in 1879, this firm is one of Canada's oldest. First clients included the Canadian Pacific Railway and Great-West Life. In 1914, the firm's Hugh Robson helped found the University of Manitoba's law school, Robson Hall. In 1969, Aikins merged with Thorvaldson and Co., led by senator G.S. Thorvaldson. The merger made Aikins the largest law firm between Toronto and Vancouver at that time. Today Aikins is one of Manitoba's largest and most diversified law firms, and is consistently involved in files that shape the province.

"Very strong employment and labour lawyers — especially Milt Christiansen and Shandra Czarnecki," said one in-house counsel who gave this firm top marks. "Overall great corporate commercial and litigation department as well. A very rich and deserving history."

