

Rising Star: Gibson Dunn's Mike Szczurek

Law360 (August 22, 2018, 1:56 PM EDT) -- Gibson Dunn & Crutcher LLP partner Mike Szczurek has successfully advised clients on a number of complex real estate portfolio transactions, such as Scion Student Communities' recent set of acquisitions that totaled about \$2.7 billion in asset value, securing him a spot as one of six real estate attorneys under 40 honored by Law360 as Rising Stars.

HIS MOST CHALLENGING MATTER:

The three separate transactions that Szczurek advised Scion on over the course of 2017 stand out not just for the dollar value, but as being among the most sophisticated, high-end work that he has recently undertaken.

"It's a very detail-driven and challenging asset class, student housing. There's a lot of information on the ground that really impacts returns and project values," he said. "I don't want to say it was high-risk for us, but everyone was very focused on the details, given how many assets we were talking about and how detail-driven it is."

"Sometimes I think the clients achieve better economics by working a deal through very quickly or promising great timing to their side, and that's definitely the tack that was taken on all three of these transactions," he said. "So it moved really quickly. We had to be really careful. It made for a very complicated and difficult transaction, but certainly a rewarding one, and one of my favorites as well."

WHY HE BECAME A REAL ESTATE ATTORNEY:

When Szczurek left law school, he was positive that he wanted to be a litigator. But thanks to Gibson Dunn's interview process, which tries to pair applicants with attorneys of similar backgrounds, his career took an unexpected turn.

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STAR



Mike Szczurek
Gibson Dunn

Age: 34

Home base: Los Angeles

Position: Partner

Law school: University of Southern California's Gould School of Law

First job after law school: Associate at Gibson Dunn

"I got assigned Jesse Sharf as the partner that was interviewing me, and the only reason they picked him is because we're both from New Jersey and we're both boxing fans. I had no interest in real estate whatsoever," he recalled. "But we hit it off, I really liked him as a person. And he convinced me to meet the people in his department, in real estate. And I found a group of people that really made me feel at home and like part of the team."

Since then, his respect for the practice has only deepened, and Szczurek has come to view the transactional work he does as a real estate attorney as fundamentally collaborative and productive, which is something that he says keeps him coming back.

"Deals feel accretive. Both sides want this thing to happen," he said. "As I've come to view litigation, as sort of an adversarial process, it's zero-sum. For someone to win, someone's got to lose. In our transactional practice, and certainly real estate in particular, it just feels like the sum of the parts is worth more than the whole."

ON HOW THE PRACTICE MIGHT CHANGE IN THE NEXT DECADE:

Szczurek has been in the field long enough to take the long view: It's an industry that has ups and downs, he said, and the best thing he can do is prepare for the next turn in the cycle, and help his clients to do the same.

"At some point, this real estate industry, which has been red hot for nine years in a row, is going to cool off. That's just going to happen at some point, and that's going to result in economic factors changing," he said.

"Over the course of the next 10 years, I imagine we'll see some downswing, and the return of an upswing hopefully," he added. "And I think when that happens, there's going to be a number of substantive changes to my practice and everyone's practice. I can't really predict exactly what that might be because they tend to be applied to the practice after the fact like Band-Aids on top of whatever unexpected result came out of the last down cycle. But I think the ever-changing face of the real estate landscape is one of the reasons I love doing this so much. It's never the same."

WHAT MOTIVATES HIM AS AN ATTORNEY:

The son of a public school teacher and an engineer, Szczurek did not grow up with lawyers in the family. And even today, he remains inspired and humbled by the helping hands he's gotten from his colleagues and clients over the course of his career. Even more than the practice itself, Szczurek said he is motivated by his wish to pay that kindness forward.

"My desire to be worthy of that help that I've received — that's been heaped upon me over the course of my career — that drives me every single day. And I think the other part of it is, being able to open a door like that for somebody else has been hugely important to me," he said. "And I've been actively involved from the day I joined the firm in recruiting, and I take great pride in being able to open that door for other people now that I have the opportunity to do that."

— As told to Sam Reisman

Law360's Rising Stars are attorneys under 40 whose legal accomplishments belie their age. A team of Law360 editors selected the 2018 Rising Stars winners after reviewing more than 1,200 submissions. This interview has been edited and condensed.

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