

## MVP: Gibson Dunn's Michael P. Darden

By Clark Mindock

*Law360 (September 10, 2021, 4:48 PM EDT)* -- Michael P. Darden of Gibson Dunn & Crutcher LLP led a successful effort to help Pioneer Natural Resources land two multibillion-dollar oil company acquisitions and expand the application of its market-leading ESG policies, earning him a spot among Law360's 2021 Energy MVPs.

### ***HIS BIGGEST ACCOMPLISHMENT OF THE LAST YEAR:***

Darden cited his work on one of those Pioneer deals — the \$6.4 billion acquisition of DoublePoint Energy in April — as a highlight of his year.

He said that the deal, which expanded Pioneer's holdings in the Permian Basin and its production to about 100,000 barrels a day, was a fairly complicated transaction, even by the standards of massive energy acquisitions. The deal was complicated and involved a lot of money, leading to many late nights and intense negotiations with the other side, which was made up of attorneys Darden had worked with before.

To make things even more complicated, it was also negotiated on an expedited timeline; Darden said trust is needed between negotiators in big deals that are moving on faster schedules than normal.

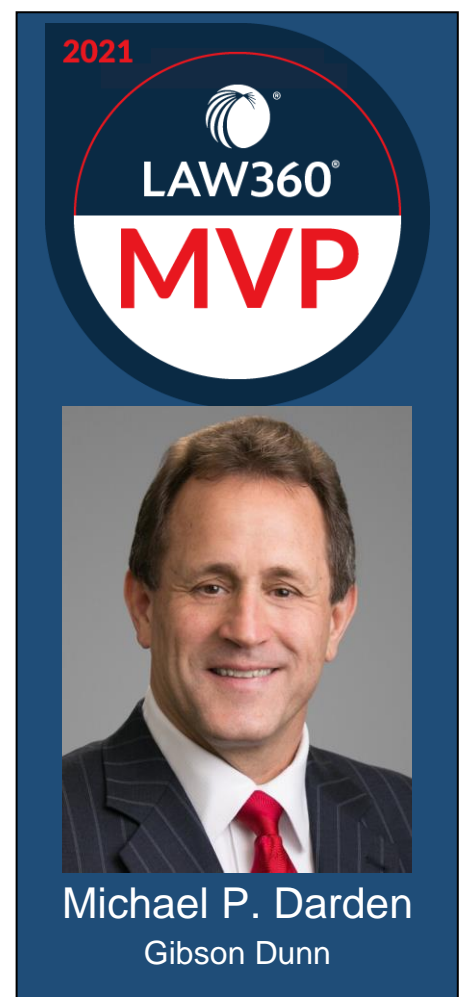
"There's a certain amount of trust, when you know the other side and you know they're good lawyers and you know they know what they're talking about," he said. "Then both sides tend to pay more attention, if you will. You're usually able to get a deal and reach compromises. Familiarity really helps in that context."

### ***HIS BIGGEST CHALLENGE OF THE YEAR:***

In a year dominated by the COVID-19 pandemic, it may come as no surprise that the coronavirus was a major obstacle, even for an MVP like Darden.

He said that much of his work over the past year was digital, not face-to-face as he's used to.

That, Darden said, was the biggest challenge.



"I really think there's a huge benefit to having face-to-face meetings, and you have to learn to adapt and adjust when you're not doing that," he said. "So, to me, that's a challenge. But one that we always overcome. You do what you need to do and you rise to the occasion."

**WHY HE IS AN ENERGY ATTORNEY:**

Oil, you could say, is in Darden's blood.

Born and raised in the Permian Basin, Darden's dad — now 95 years old — was a geologist who worked on exploration until his 94th birthday. His brothers are engineers in the industry, too.

But Darden also said there is just a certain type of person who works in the industry he loves to be around. They risk a lot, and they can reap the benefits, too. That works for him, he said.

"I guess it's in our blood, but I grew up in a town that's based on the oil and gas industry. It was what my dad did and all my friends' dads did as we were growing up," Darden said. "I'm really bred into it. Or maybe it was bred into me."

**WHAT MOTIVATES HIM:**

Darden said he likes a good challenge, and that oil and gas deals are pretty good sport.

He added he's goal- and achievement-oriented, and he enjoys the thrill of face-to-face negotiations, which he said might be a reason he is less excited by the Zoom negotiations of the pandemic.

Darden said he especially likes the thrill of walking out of a conference room with a good deal for his client.

"And I know a lot of the guys I negotiate opposite of. I like engaging, I like crossing swords with those guys," he said. "They're people I've known for years and years and negotiated against. There's some level of challenge and also some level of fun in those negotiations. I like to think that my clients come out a lot more often than not on top."

— *As told to Clark Mindock*

*Law360's MVPs are attorneys who have distinguished themselves from their peers over the past year through high-stakes litigation, record-breaking deals and complex global matters. A team of Law360 editors selected the 2021 MVP winners after reviewing nearly 900 submissions.*