

FORTY UNDER 40 2017

Elizabeth O'Brien has earned a reputation as one of the top real estate attorneys in Chicago. But she's accomplished something else, too: She's become an inspiration.

Christine Bolger, an attorney with Firsell Ross in Bannockburn, said that O'Brien's success should serve as an inspiration to other women. By crafting such a busy practice, Bolger shows that it is possible to not only succeed but to thrive when working in a field of law serving an industry that is traditionally dominated by men.

"Elizabeth is truly an inspiration for other young women, especially those who want to succeed in real estate and real estate law," Bolger said. "Real estate tends to be male-dominated, and she has shown that women can get ahead, and be successful, and break the glass ceiling."

While serving as a role model to aspiring real estate attorneys, O'Brien has also earned the gratitude of her many clients, clients whom she has helped succeed in the often-competitive world of real estate. Beth Sprecher Brooks, senior vice president and general counsel with IRC Retail Centers, said that O'Brien has handled several complex transactions for her company.

These transactions often involve the purchase of several parcels from different owners with a joint venture partner. In closing these deals, O'Brien not only has to deal with numerous sellers, but also the municipality, IRC and the company's partner.

"Many moving parts," Brooks said. "She has handled it all with grace and skill. She can find solutions to the legal problems and to the people problems that so often hold up a transaction. She has always found a way to get us to the finish line in record time. She has an excellent analytical mind."

O'Brien's peers say that her success is no surprise. That's because this young attorney with Chicago's Levenfeld Pearlstein truly cares about her clients and their businesses.

Ian Williams, corporate counsel with Axiom, points to the work that O'Brien handled for the owners of a small business in Chicago's South Loop neighborhood. The owners had lost their lease and were searching for a new building for their business. The owners finally found a new space after a frustrating search, but by that time had seen their financial resources drained. Key investors were about to pull their own financial support.

Williams asked O'Brien to spare a few moments to provide these owners with advice. Instead, O'Brien, on a pro bono basis, gave the owners the same level of attention and service that she would provide to her biggest corporate clients. O'Brien ultimately put together a deal with terms that made the business viable. It reopened and has been operating successfully ever since.

"Without her efforts, the business would not have secured the new space, and may never have opened," Williams said. "The owners never cease to thank me for introducing them to Elizabeth."

When not helping business owners, O'Brien has served as a mentor through the Chicago Bar Association's student-mentoring program for high-school students. She is also a very active member of CREW Chicago (Commercial Real Estate Executive Women of Chicago), where she is currently a member of the Scholarship Committee which works to financially support and empower young women majoring or concentrating in real estate, construction, facility management, architecture, urban planning, real estate law, land economics, real estate appraisal or related real estate fields. If that is not enough, O'Brien was recently named to the Board of Directors for the Harold E. Eisenberg Foundation, an organization dedicated to (GI) cancer research and real estate education.

ELIZABETH O'BRIEN



Age
39

Firm

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Law School

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Practice Area
Real estate law

“THE OWNERS NEVER
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