

Change Is The Only Constant

Law firm Mills Selig has gone through many changes during its history. Formed in 1959 by the amalgamation of the businesses of Stratton Mills and Ivan Selig, it was once a small practice dealing with a mixture of property matters and private clients. Today it is thriving as one of Northern Ireland's leading commercial law firms with a strong reputation in all areas of commercial law.

Managing Partner John Kearns says "Within our core areas of practice, including corporate finance, commercial property, litigation and employment, our teams of lawyers are leaders in their fields and have the experience and know-how to get deals done."

The partners have invested time and resources in ensuring that whatever the prevailing economic climate, they excel at providing legal services and commercial solutions to clients' ever-changing needs. There is a very strong ethos of understanding the individual needs of each client and providing them with a service they actually require. "The strength of this practice is that it brings a business mind to legal services. Clients require the kind of expertise, efficiency and cost-effective advice that Mills Selig can provide to them. Our website describes us as 'Fresh, Direct, Pragmatic' and this is the kind of advice we consistently deliver to our clients." Mills Selig provides its clients with advice on all aspects of their business whether that be the sale or purchase of a business

or company, company structure, employee issues, contracts, property or disputes with other businesses. "Our clients return to us time and again, not just because of our technical expertise, but also because our lawyers are engaging and pleasant to work with - we are as much a people business as many of our clients." Significantly, the firm is one of the few firms in Northern Ireland experienced in acting for public companies and its clients include the Mallusk and London-based AssetCo plc and Newry-based First Derivatives plc. "Both of these companies require high calibre and varied advice, often at short notice. Working with them in the international markets in which they operate can be challenging but meeting those challenges is rewarding and energising."

At the same time, small to medium business and local and family owned firms are a key part of Mills Selig, most of whom have been clients for many years and John says the firm is honoured by their loyalty, particularly in such competitive times. "We get to know our clients so we can understand the needs of their business as well as they do. We are not just looking for a fee and a handshake. We aim to ensure that all of our clients benefit from the unique type of service we are able

their behalf and they don't need to engage anyone but us". The corporate team has seen business pick up since the start of the year and it continues to work on significant and complex deals - both for existing and new clients. Recent projects include advising the shareholders of O'Kane Poultry Limited on the acquisition of the company by Moy Park Limited, one of the most significant deals in Northern Ireland so far this year, as well as acting for First Derivatives plc in a number of acquisitions, both local and international.

The firm's litigation team continues to attract interesting, high value cases and enjoys a major presence in the fields of employment, injunctions, judicial review, planning, defamation, debt recovery and property litigation. The team presently advises clients, including Warrenpoint Harbour Authority, Australian Multinational Village Theatres 3 Limited and the McCausland Group, on a wide variety of matters.

Despite the dramatic downturn in the property market the Mills Selig property team is still very active and continues to advise on a range of projects, both locally and throughout the UK and Ireland. Their clients include developers, investors, landlords, tenants, banks and local and public authorities. Notable transactions this year have included advising Kevin Watson Construction Ltd in the sale of the residential units at the Curzon Apartment Development Belfast and advising Swinton Group Ltd (Open & Direct Insurance) on the continued expansion of its property portfolio in Northern Ireland.

Like all legal firms Mills Selig has had to deal with the realities of the downturn in the economy but its adaptability and flexibility has helped it weather the storm. John is cautiously optimistic about the future of the local business community. "We have seen an increase in business in recent months with improvement across all of our teams which is very positive. We are also retaining all of our trainees this year and have recruited another to start in September. This year we also recruited two more lawyers, both of whom had previously been working for international firms in



London and joined our team on returning to Northern Ireland." He also finds that business clients are actually more likely to seek advice in this climate than not - "clients are more risk averse than ever and our input can be vital in helping them make that final decision on whether to proceed with a transaction or not - the key is that we understand their business and can inform their decision." Mills Selig is looking to the future. "As we see more clients come in the door, we want to ensure that the high level of service they receive continues, so we therefore will continue to recruit strong and capable lawyers to keep clients satisfied. We pride ourselves on our

ability to provide sound legal advice within the necessary timescale, whether that be a few hours or a few weeks. The e-business economy within which we exist means that the demand for a rapid response is becoming an essential part of the business law firm's resume and we intend to make any adjustments necessary to our business in order to meet the needs of our clients." "We are constantly reviewing the services we provide and asking ourselves and our clients how we can be better." It is this commitment to change to ensure that clients' needs are being met that will no doubt see Mills Selig maintain its reputation as a leading commercial firm.

