



THINK FORWARD

Honoring Gary Ropski

By [Gary Ropski](#)

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Following an illustrious 43-year career with Brinks Gilson & Lione, Gary Ropski announced his retirement at the end of 2019. Joining Brinks just out of law school in June 1976, Ropski had the privilege of practicing alongside some of the firm's leading attorneys. Jim Hume, who began his career with Brinks in 1926—just nine years after its founding—was one of the first to take Ropski under his wing. Whether assisting with patent claims for one of the first successful electric toothbrushes or litigating a copyright dispute surrounding *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, throughout his career Ropski met and served many of Brinks' most prestigious clients, and tackled cases and projects that both interested and challenged him.



Although he holds a bachelor's degree in physics, Ropski says, "I was encouraged to handle more than just patent cases by pursuing my interest in trademark and copyright matters, and always felt supported in whatever intrigued me along the way." In fact, in 1983, after only seven years with the firm, shareholder Jerry Gilson encouraged Ropski to argue a trademark opposition in front of the Trademark Trial and Appeal Board and later to the Federal Circuit. He did so successfully, becoming the first Brinks attorney to argue before that court.

While Ropski enjoyed practicing law, it's not the work that he says holds his fondest memories of Brinks. It's the people.

"What I liked most about Brinks was that we were never looking for a certain 'type' of lawyer," Ropski says. "Even back when I started, the firm didn't necessarily hire attorneys from the top of Ivy League

classes. They wanted people who thought differently and came from varied backgrounds and neighborhoods so that we were always amicably questioning and challenging each other. And that," the former president says proudly, "remains true today."

Over the years, Ropski embraced his own role as mentor. When shareholder Jim Cleland began working with Ropski in 2004, Cleland quickly noticed that his mentor had not just finely honed skill, but a genuine gift for his craft.

"He could review thousands of pages of technical material and pull out the most important two or three points in a fraction of the time it takes even the most seasoned attorneys," Cleland says. "In court, he was unafraid to sacrifice the lesser arguments to focus on the best one, and that's hard for any lawyer to do. It has been fun to watch," he adds, "and learning from him has been a pleasure and a privilege."

Along with his thoughtful approach and expert guidance, Ropski also shared important life lessons with his colleagues. Shareholder Brad Lane recalls driving home after a long day of client meetings in Detroit with Ropski on September 11, 2001. The team's plans to fly back to Chicago were foiled, as so many were by the terrorist attacks that day. Eager to return home to his wife and young children, Lane was confounded when Ropski, an astronomy enthusiast, stopped at a rest area to gaze at the Milky Way.

"He wanted to find a moment of peace in all of the chaos," Lane says of his mentor, "and the older I get, the more I appreciate that stepping away from my daily routine to consider the big picture and what really matters is an important part of gaining better balance in my life, and serving my clients well."

Like any distinguished and highly regarded attorney in a city buzzing with opportunity, Ropski had his share of offers from outside firms. "People asked me all the time why I never left Brinks," he says. "My answer was always: Why would I?"

In addition to his shareholder status, Gary served as firm president from 2006 until 2011. He continues to mediate IP matters with ADR Systems in Chicago.