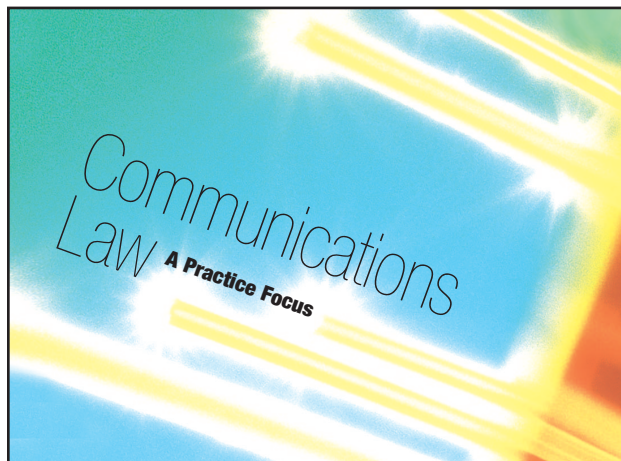


Identifying **10** Leading Communications Lawyers

This is the fifth year that *Legal Times* has prepared our Leading Lawyer lists, and we've learned a few things along the way. For example, most practice areas are not small worlds. Attorneys don't cross each other's path nearly as often as reporters seeking comparisons, invidious or otherwise, might wish. So when a lot of communications law experts started pointing fingers in the same direction, we sat up and took notice: Him and him. Him. Oh, and him. Got it.

The next step was to make sure that we weren't receiving old news. None of the 10 lawyers made it onto *Legal Times'* list based on their illustrious achievements of 20 years ago. Their clients are not asking what has been done for them lately. Indeed, the tally of what all these lawyers have accomplished in recent years is positively exhausting.

Fortunately, freelancer Jenna Greene is not easily tired. After the nominations came rolling in, Greene



hit the phones to interview private practitioners, in-house counsel, and other longtime observers of the communications bar. The result is this list of 10 top-notch attorneys.

To learn more about *Legal Times'* Leading Lawyers series, you can visit www.legaltimes.com. One more report is planned for this year: Nominations for the best in international trade law are due July 20.

Leading LAWYERS

Ten of the D.C. Area's Top Communications Lawyers

Jonathan Blake

Covington & Burling

When the paradigm has shifted in telecommunications, Jonathan Blake has often been one of the moving forces.

He represented one of the very first cellular operators (back when the technology was known as “radio telephone”) and has been the broadcast industry’s lawyer of choice in the 20-year effort to design and navigate the transition from analog to digital TV. The senior counsel at Covington & Burling has also been a leader in battles over media ownership rules, indecency standards, and broadband wireless service.

“This field has got to be the most dynamic there is,” says Blake, 69. “Things are always changing, and getting in on the ground floor of a new development is really gratifying.”

Jack Sander, senior adviser at Belo Corp., a Dallas-based media company that owns 20 television stations and nine newspapers, praises Blake for his “brains, intelligence, background, and perspective.”

“He has a good grasp of the direct implications of things that go on in the media world,” says Sanders. “But he’s also savvy enough to understand the indirect implications.”

Blake’s latest effort also may have a lasting impact, this time on the future of wireless communications. His client is Frontline Wireless, an investment group backed by Silicon Valley venture capitalists.

Frontline has its sights on a piece of prime spectrum in the 700 MHz band to be auctioned off by the Federal Communications Commission later this year. Described as the last “beachfront property” in the wireless world, the spectrum, now used by UHF broadcasters, is worth an estimated \$15 billion to \$25 billion. The UHF stations will vacate the area when they switch from analog to digital in 2009.

Frontline has what Blake describes as “an innovative plan” to provide “a new kind of service for wireless broadband for public safety and commercial users.” The group, which boasts former FCC Chairman Reed Hundt as vice chairman, proposes to create an “open access” network, one that could be used by a range of wireless devices, not just those associated with the auction winner. Frontline also proposes to use part of the spectrum for public safety. In the event of an emergency, Frontline would turn over this wireless broadband network to police, fire, and other emergency responders, allowing them to communicate with each other nationwide.

Frontline Chairman Janice Obuchowski says Blake is “as good as they come.”

“He has a superb legal mind and a wealth of experience,” she continues. “Through and through, he’s a person committed to the highest standards of the legal profession.”

One of Blake’s oldest clients is the Washington Post Co. During the Watergate era, the licenses for two of the company’s TV stations came up for renewal, and they were challenged. Blake spent three years working on the case, which was resolved in his client’s favor. He continues to advise the company on strategic issues with respect to broadcasting, cable, and the Internet.

Diana Daniels, who retired earlier this year as Washington Post Co. general counsel, calls Blake “the most ethical person I can imagine in the legal profession. You can trust him absolutely. . . . He has such incredible judgment, and he does it in a very low-key manner. He’s the pro’s pro.”

Other longtime clients include the NBC and CBS affiliate groups, PBS, and 150 individual television stations.

During the transition to digital TV, Blake was tapped by the Association for Maximum Service Television and the Advanced Television Test Center, the latter of which was created and funded by the broadcast industry and equipment manufacturers to test proposed digital TV standards.

“In the end, that testing process resulted in a merger of four of the competing systems,” explains Blake. “There will be 200 million sets sold by the time of the transition that will comply with these standards. This is going to touch every consumer in America.”

Blake was also on the front lines of the birth of cell phone service. In 1983, he says, he wrote “the first request to have radio frequencies set aside for cell phone service” on behalf of the now-defunct Washington/Baltimore Radio Telephone Co. “It was very hard to get spectrum set aside,” he recalls. The FCC required a technical demonstration to prove that the phone signals wouldn’t interfere with other spectrum users.

In the intervening years, Blake estimates, he has handled more than 100 deals to buy or sell cellular licenses.

Blake earned his law degree from Yale Law School in 1964 and then joined Covington as an associate. He has never left, serving as chairman of the firm from 1996 to 2001.

He now heads up the 80-lawyer technology, communications, and media practice. Notable colleagues include Jennifer Johnson, Mace Rosenstein, and Gerald Waldron. “The great strength of our practice is the team,” says Blake.

