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page 22

Gawthrop Greenwood  
Attorneys At Law

Gawthrop Greenwood's team of attorneys devoted to community association law includes (left to right) Elliot H. Berton, Holly L. Setzler, Steven L. Sugarman, and James D. Doyle.



# A PERFECT MATCH for Your HOA or Condo Association

West Chester's **Gawthrop Greenwood** augments its powerhouse legal team by adding the foremost attorneys in the rapidly growing field of community association law.

by **Matt Cosentino** | photos by **Jody Robinson**

**G**awthrop Greenwood, PC's rich history dates back more than a century—120 years and counting, in fact. It has become one of the region's most esteemed law firms by continually adding to its depth and breadth of legal expertise. Most recently, the firm has bolstered its standing in the fast-growing field of community association law, where Gawthrop Greenwood now serves a significant portion of the state's 6,000 condominium associations, planned communities, and cooperatives. The impressive expansion of this specialized area of legal services came after merging with law firms owned by Steven L. Sugarman and Holly L. Setzler, who are considered pioneers in the field.

Sugarman has been a community association attorney for more than four decades, and has been instrumental in helping to establish statutory and decisional law governing Pennsylvania's condominiums, planned communities, and cooperatives where so many Pennsylvanians now live—or will live soon. Setzler has been practicing since the 1980s, with accomplishments including a landmark victory before the Pennsylvania Superior Court for homeowner and condominium associations.

"It has been a great collaboration," Setzler says. "There are so many facets to this practice area, and the appeal of having a larger firm with litigation support, business law support, and all of the departments that Gawthrop Greenwood offers was such a big benefit to our clients."

"It has been a very positive shift," Sugarman adds. "This was an incredible opportunity to merge and establish one of the best and most experienced community association law firms in the Commonwealth."



**The firm bolstered its expertise in community association law after merging with the law firms owned by Sugarman and Setzler, each considered a pioneer in the field.**

### On the Rise

Community association law has risen in significance because, as Setzler notes, most of the state's new housing developments are approved only if they are governed by such an entity. These associations have assumed responsibilities previously handled by municipalities, such as street maintenance, trash pickup, snow removal, and stormwater management.

Because they are so common, all parties with an interest in the community—from association boards and builders/developers to engineers, architects, property managers, Realtors, insurance professionals, and more—may need assistance addressing the complex and ever-evolving principles of community association law. Gawthrop Greenwood is one of the few firms offering the comprehensive suite of legal services encompassing the field.

Sugarman and Setzler were already familiar with each other prior to joining Gawthrop Greenwood. Due to their lofty positions in the field, they often crossed paths at legal proceedings and national conferences. They have always had a healthy admiration for one another and the role each has played in helping to grow the field; in fact, they occasionally reached out to one another for perspectives on issues related to their work.

Now those conversations can take place within the same office.

"It seems at least weekly there's a new issue that we get to see in our practices, and new challenges," Sugarman says. "Having the opportunity to work with a larger group of talented lawyers with skills in other specialty areas is extremely helpful and very valuable for the representation of our clientele."

Additional Gawthrop Greenwood attorneys devoted to community association law include Elliot H. Berton and James D. Doyle. Their areas of expertise include general counsel, assessment collection, transition from declarant

control, drafting and amending governing documents, statutory compliance, resolving disputes among homeowners—the list goes on and on.

Setzler says, "The panoply of issues that arise in a community association that require the board's attention makes every day interesting. As communities are aging, for example, we offer our experience to assist navigating the remediation process, identifying appropriate professionals, addressing funding challenges, and the like."

They take their roles as leaders and educators very seriously. As an adjunct professor at the Villanova University Charles Widger School of Law, Sugarman developed one of the few law school courses in the country on condominium and homeowner association law and regularly lectures on the subject at the state and national levels.

"With this area of the law now impacting so many people, helping other lawyers and professionals in the industry gain a better understanding of the legal rights and responsibilities of associations, developers, owners, buyers, sellers, and lenders is hugely important," Sugarman explains. "We can litigate, and we

have skills in the courtroom, but if we're also able to resolve disputes amicably and keep the sense of community in the community association, I think we've served the industry well and have done our jobs effectively. I know Holly shares this point of view as well."

Setzler adds, "When we have exhausted reasonable efforts to resolve contested issues and litigation results, it is gratifying when we prevail for the benefit of the community and to preserve the integrity of the law."

The community association law team is thrilled to have the opportunity to work together at Gawthrop Greenwood, a firm that is marking its 120th year in business in 2024, just as the borough of West Chester—the location of the firm's headquarters—is celebrating its 225th birthday. Over that stretch, Gawthrop Greenwood has produced seven judges, including the first female judge in Chester County, two judges who went on to the Superior Court of Pennsylvania, and another who became a Federal District Court Judge. Its attorneys are regularly recognized for their contributions to the law, and 11 have been named president of the Chester County Bar Association.

"It's clearly one of the most prominent law firms not only in Chester County but in the Greater Philadelphia and Mid-Atlantic region," Sugarman says. "In many respects, its history and reputation have facilitated our ability to continue to attract clients to the firm and to continue to have an influential voice in the legal community."

"I've always held Gawthrop Greenwood in high esteem, even before joining the firm," Setzler adds. "Their reputation was stellar in the community, and they've always been well respected by the bench and by local businesses. When this merger came about, I could not have been prouder to become part of it." ■



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