

Filling the NICHE



Robert Fafinski: *Flying the Friendly Skies*

When you ask Bob Fafinski of Fafinski Mark & Johnson what's fun about his commercial law practice, he grins and says, "I love deals — the strategy for putting a deal together." He adds, "There's nothing more beautiful than creating a strategy and achieving it." The 30 to 40 percent of his time that's spent on aviation law gives him plenty of opportunity for achieving deal-making beauty.

It began in the early '80s when a colleague who did a lot of aviation litigation walked down the hall and said, "I just got a call from this new airline, Sun Country. They need a good commercial lawyer. Ever leased an airplane? Would you like to?"

Fafinski consulted with a leading expert at a "huge New York law firm," who discouraged him from taking the case — because of the complexity, and perhaps because he wanted the business himself. That was all the encouragement the stubborn 25-year-old needed. A week later he was negotiating Sun Country's lease with a British firm. This led to a second lease and a third, and to a subspecialty in aviation commercial law.

Although Minnesota is considered off the beaten path for aviation law, Fafinski says that his firm sometimes spots trends earlier than competitors. Large law firms in New York, Los Angeles, Tokyo, London and Paris often represent large institutional aircraft lessors. "When you work on the airline side, you see how the airline is trying to improve its business. They

call to ask your advice." He develops expertise on the next new thing — expertise that generates referrals within the industry.

Although the airline industry is notorious for its cyclical nature, Fafinski says no matter what there are always more deals to make. And he will have a blast putting them together.