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FIRM WATCH / NEW PRESIDENT

## Parr Brown's governance structure is a Democracy, not a Republic

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—Kenneth B. Tillou

Donna K. W. Johnson

Parr Brown Gee & Loveless is not your typical law firm in its management style, according to new firm president Kenneth B. Tillou. The firm's philosophy, its governance structure and the experience it offers new lawyers all differ from other law firms'. What's more, Tillou says, the firm, now 72 attorneys strong, is growing even in the midst of a still-stuttering economy.

Tillou earned his JD *summa cum laude* from Washington & Lee University School of Law, where he was editor-in-chief of the *Law Review*. He clerked for Judge Richard J. Cardamone of the U.S. Court of Appeals. Now he focuses his practice on income tax issues, employee benefits and executive compensation matters. He served a year as secretary at Parr Brown before becoming firm president. He will serve as president for a year as well.

The one-year presidency is part of the firm's unusual structure, Tillou says: "Basically [the office] devolves down the shareholder letterhead. Our president doesn't have quite the same decision-making authority that goes with the job in some firms, and the office changes annually. The firm's philosophy for management is very egalitarian. Every attorney in the firm is a member of our board of directors. That includes associates as well as shareholders. We all meet once a month. The board is the final decision-making body on issues of any significance. That means that everybody gets input rather than just a few at the top."

Tillou continues his explanation: "Every lawyer in the firm also serves on one of our board committees. We have a legal personnel committee, a recruiting committee, a marketing committee, a technology committee, a finance and accounting committee and a physical facilities committee, among others."



Kenneth B. Tillou, President of Parr Brown Gee & Loveless

The committees address issues specific to their area of focus, according to Tillou. They make some decisions on their own and report to the full board on other issues that affect everyone in the firm. Committee memberships rotate. "That means," Tillou says, "that you could be on the finance and accounting committee one year and on the recruiting committee the next. The only restriction is that people on the legal

personnel committee must be shareholders and are elected by the shareholders only. Other than that, any lawyer is eligible to be appointed to any committee. We think that's one of the attractive features of this firm: Everyone gets experience. Everyone sees the monthly financial statements. The only disadvantage is that sometimes really complicated issues take a little longer to resolve. But we think it's worth it. Young attorneys who work here learn more about the actual business of practicing law than they would in a more-typically-structured firm our size or larger. We believe that the additional experience will make them better lawyers."

Tillou says this is his first time as president, but he has served as treasurer: "The experience of serving as secretary helps prepare a person for the job of president. The president sets the agenda for the year, chairs the finance and accounting committee, which oversees financial matters, and provides coordination between committees."

Growth tops this year's agenda. "Putting it simply, we need more attorneys," Tillou says. "We had a very good year last year, notwithstanding the weakness in the economy. We haven't scaled back on our hiring programs at the law schools

at all. We promoted four associates to shareholders this year: Rita Cornish, Robyn Wicks, Matthew Tenney and Breanne Fors. We're looking for laterals in areas where we have needs, particularly litigation attorneys with three to seven years' experience at this time. We don't have a headhunter actually working for us; we're searching by word of mouth."

Another issue on this year's firm agenda involves technology. "We're moving our e-mail and document services out into what's known as the cloud," Tillou explains. "Until now we have handled all of our technology needs in-house and on-site. But we'll be sending more of it out of the office as time goes on."

Tillou says most of the firm's work, which includes litigation and complex corporate transactional work, has not changed with the economy. There is one difference: "We are seeing more out-of-state work. We have quite a few clients headquartered outside Utah. In the past, they used us for work in Utah. But now they are using us for more work outside the state as well. We understand from them that our fee structure is favorable compared to that of some out-of-state firms they have used in the past, so work is shifting in our direction."