

Missouri Lawyers 2020

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ AWARDS

LAW FIRM LEADER

Cameron Garrison Lathrop GPM

Cameron Garrison didn't take long to make a prominent mark in his leadership role at Lathrop Gage.

Garrison, who took over as the firm's managing partner in January 2018, had a busy year in 2019. He provided the guiding force for his firm as it merged with Minneapolis-based firm Gray Plant Mooty, opened an office in Dallas, expanded its Los Angeles presence and saw its IP practice in Boston grow.

"The merger is a big step forward for our organization," Garrison said. "It's something we put a whole lot of work into — a lot of long nights and weekends, but it's well worth it. You almost forget it's such hard work because you see all of the reasons it will work so well."

The merger of the firm now known as Lathrop GPM became official Jan. 1, and Garrison is Lathrop's managing partner and chair of its 13-member executive committee.

Garrison said the firm had been looking to grow as part of its strategic plan but wanted to make sure it found the right match. An industry consultant made the connection, believing Lathrop Gage and Gray Plant Mooty would work well together because of the firms' practice areas, locations and work quality. From there, things meshed well almost instantly.

"Once we met them and started getting to know them, we saw it was going to be a



really good fit, personally and professionally," Garrison said. "It felt like we'd been working together for 20 years."

As merger talks progressed and every time the group expanded with more lawyers, the bond between the two firms only grew stronger, he said. In September, a dinner with 25-30 practice leaders in Minneapolis proved to be the defining moment when Garrison knew things were headed in the right direction.

"After the dinner, I was standing to the side with Mike Sullivan [GPM's former managing officer, the partner-in-charge of the combined firm's Minneapolis office]," Garrison said. "He kind of looked over and said, 'You think we could just leave?' And we did. We didn't have to keep chaperoning it and curating them."

The firm of nearly 400 attorneys in 14 offices across the country won't have a headquarters, which Garrison said fits with the group's philosophy of serving its clients where and how they need legal help.

"Our clients expect us to operate like a business and interact with them in a way that addresses their legal and business needs. I think the modern client demands that integrated approach," he said.

Following and spreading the firm's philosophy to its many offices means a lot of travel for Garrison, who said Boston and Los Angeles are the firm's two fastest-growing markets.

"You have to be present. You have to be interacting with lawyers regularly," he said. "When you have one law firm with 14 different offices, it's the only way to effectively communicate and integrate."

While Lathrop and GPM have laid good groundwork, more work remains to ensure a successful merger in 2020, including a focus on making sure the two law firms integrate effectively, Garrison said. That also includes a search for a chief client officer, whose primary roles will include business development, price management and embracing the modern client.

"This really is the result from a lot of hard work from a whole lot of people," Garrison said. "While I appreciate the award, I really don't think this was about me. It's much more about what the firm has done."

— Scott Andera

“... We saw [the Lathrop GPM merger] was going to be a really good fit, personally and professionally.”