


# Last Cooney Bids Farewell To Century-Old Family Firm

*Posted on: December 11, 2020*

**“I’m the last Cooney in a reasonably long line of Partners. Next year (2021) will be the first time in 103 years that there won’t be a Cooney involved in the partnership so that has been a pretty challenging concept for me to come to terms with,” he acknowledges.**

The firm was originally founded by Owen’s grandfather, H.O. Cooney, in 1918. Owen’s

father, Des, plus numerous aunts, uncles and cousins have all worked there in the decades since. Owen himself has been a Partner since 1987 during an almost 40 year legal career.

“When my grandfather first hung up his shingle in 1918 I’m sure he had no inkling whatsoever that he had started something that would endure for over 100 years. He was a very strong family-orientated man, as most of the Cooneys are with their Irish heritage. I think he would be a very proud chappie.”

Owen studied law at Otago University and worked for a large firm in Auckland before joining the family business in Tauranga in the early 1980s. He founded CLM’s Property and Development team and has specialised in property transactions, business structures and rural business advisory throughout a period of enormous regional growth.

While he’s been the ‘go to’ man for complex deals and high profile clients for decades, it’s his work within the firm that he’s most proud of.

“Being involved in the thought leadership, alongside other young members of our team, to help bring our firm into the 21st century way of doing things, is something I will always personally feel very satisfied about.

“The old style of law was you played your cards pretty close to your chest; you didn’t really tell the client what was going on and a lot of it was cloaked in mystery. But the modern way of practicing now is to be quite open and transparent and provide the full scope of services to the client before you actually undertake a job rather than the other way around. We’ve developed a client-centric approach and a more modern way of doing business.”

The sheer growth of the firm, and a commitment to fostering new talent, is another personal highlight.

“One of the great things that I will look back on and feel very satisfied about, is this team that has been created over time. The Property and Development team basically started with myself and Peter Rust. Now there’s around 20 of us. We’ve recruited and developed some great people and as I step off the ship, I feel pretty satisfied that there’s a great team here that’s going to carry on looking after my clients, and playing a significant role for the firm.”

Partner Cam Russell will now take over leading CLM’s Property and Development team, and Owen plans to start a small consultancy business which will contract back to the firm for the

next 12 months to help smooth the transition process for both clients and staff.

Cam says he has always valued Owen's energy and solutions-based approach to the law. "My fondest memory of Owen is when he decided to give a recent graduate with no legal experience a crack – that graduate being me some 10+ years ago! For me personally, Owen has always been the leader of our Property and Development team and I will miss having someone with as much experience and knowledge as him to bounce ideas around."

Fellow Partner Matt Tustin says Owen is very highly regarded in the legal industry and is always good fun around the office.

"He is a strategic thinker and often his advice goes beyond 'legal matters' – he is very commercially minded. I will miss his constant search for business improvement, and his willingness to try things and invest in the future.

"On behalf of the current partnership and staff I would just like to thank him for his immense contribution to the firm over many decades. We will miss him but we look forward to working closely with him as part of his new endeavours."

Away from the office, Owen will remain a Director of Bay of Plenty Rugby where he contributes his legal and business expertise to help the local union navigate the professional era and develop sustainable commercial arrangements. "Rugby is an absolute passion and I love being involved in that grassroots stuff. I'll continue until I'm no longer needed in that space."

The 63 year-old credits his wife, Karen, for having been a great support throughout his career. And while none of Owen's three children decided to follow him into law, he believes each of them has benefited from the family legacy.

"James, Sean and Georgia are extremely successful in their own right. They've spent a lot of time in and around the firm over the years and I feel like they've picked up some really valuable life and business skills, whether they're conscious of it or not.

"I'd also like to pay tribute to all of the previous Partners, including my cousins Michael and Paul, and my father, Des… we can never forget that they're the folk who laid the platform for what we've got here today."