

PROFILE: The Corydon Group LLC Reputations help lobbyists build business Shared passion for government led golf buddies to partnership

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When Chris Gibson and Mike Leppert headed for the golf course in the late 1990s, it was strictly business.

Walking from tee to tee, the men talked about lobbying, the law and regulatory agencies. After 18 months of playing 18 holes, they decided to form The Corydon Group, a government relations firm founded in 2000 in Indianapolis.

The firm monitors bills and amendments proposed in the Indiana General Assembly, prepares reports on key legislation, attends meetings and hearings, and lobbies lawmakers.

Its tag line—"first government affairs"—celebrates Indiana's first state capital, even though neither partner is from the Harrison County community.

How conversations on the golf course at Broadmoor Country Club morphed into a business has a lot to do with the guys' love of government affairs.



IBJ Photo/Robin Jerstad

The Corydon Group's Mike Leppert and Chris Gibson, middle, share a laugh outside the Indiana House chambers with state Rep. Bill Davis of Portland, left, and fellow lobbyist Brooke Burnett.

Gibson, 34, grew up in Evansville, and did an internship at the Indiana Civil Rights Commission while a student at Marian College. After graduation, he worked as a legislative liaison for the Indiana Civil Liberties Union and enrolled at the Indiana University School of Law in Indianapolis. When he passed the bar, he opened a law office.

Leppert, 40, grew up in Vincennes and received a criminal justice degree from the Indiana University School of Public and Environmental Affairs. He worked for five years at the Indiana Boys School before joining the Indiana Utility Regulatory Commission. There, he was director of consumer affairs, then consumer counselor and, the last five years, executive director.

In his IURC posts, Leppert worked with the General Assembly, which is where he and Gibson first crossed paths. Their business plan was scrawled on a paper napkin at Shula's Steak House.

"We're both entrepreneurial at heart and were willing to take the risk," Gibson said.

Startup costs were minimal and each partner brought a diverse client mix to the venture, including Time Warner Telecom, Marian College, Boyd Gaming (Blue Chip Casino), The Nature Conservancy, Northern Indiana Public Service Co., Wal-Mart Stores, Indiana Association of School Psychologists, T-Mobile USA, Coca-Cola Co. and the Green Industry Alliance.

The Corydon Group has marketed itself via word of mouth, building on the partners' reputations and relationship. As a result, growth has exceeded expectations, with 20-percent to 25-percent increases the last three years.

The firm, which also employs Leppert's former boss at the IURC, William D. McCarty, also has a niche in working regulatory issues.

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Founded: 2000
Founders/owners: Christopher M. Gibson and Michael C. Leppert
Services: lobbying, project management, government affairs, business consulting

"The expertise Mike brings and his understanding of my company" makes The Corydon Group stand out, said Pamela Sherwood, a vice president in Time Warner Telecom's Midwest region, which covers nine states. "They really get to know you and what your company's needs are, spot legislation and can speak about issues" to legislators.

Not many other firms offer a similar array of services and expertise, said Ed Roberts, a vice president of human resources, labor, legal and political affairs for the Indiana Manufacturers Association. The association has not been a client of The Corydon Group, but has worked with the firm on similar interests.

The Corydon Group works hard, said Roberts, a lobbyist for 30 years. "Lobbying is hard,

government affairs, business consulting

Employees: five

Revenue (2007): \$950,000

One-year goal: diversify services for existing clients; add two to four clients

Industry outlook: Stable. Services are driven by issues and changes in elected and appointed government officials.

physical labor. There 's a lot of standing around in marble halls on hard marble floors for 16 hours a day, sometimes more. "

Leppert said he tells clients the firm 's competitiveness is what sets it apart. "I don't like losing," he admitted.

Gibson said the firm is non -partisan. As he tells clients, the group "leaves personal policies at the door of the Statehouse and advocates the best interests of our clients. "

The partners believe that, no matter what the venture, if entrepreneurs love what they do and work hard, they'll be successful.

"If you truly love what you are doing, and it's something you 're passionate about, you are eager to go to work, " Leppert said. •



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