

## point of view

# In his 50-year career, attorney **FRANK GIMBEL** has prosecuted the mafia and overseen the city's arenas and convention center. He's used to the hot seat.

BY KURT CHANDLER

**There are a lot of big plans on the drawing board for Downtown Milwaukee. One is to expand the convention center north to Kilbourn Avenue. Why?**

We've fallen behind. Our number of events and attendance has gone down because our peer competitors have changed their practical profile. The meeting planners are looking for more exhibit space. Columbus, St. Paul, Minneapolis, Pittsburgh, those are cities we compete with. Indianapolis has gotten to be almost like Chicago in terms of the space that they have. They have created a niche for amateur sports.

**A study for the Wisconsin Center District, which you chair, recommends a mixed-use hub anchored by the convention center and a sports-entertainment arena, replacing the BMO Harris Bradley Center.**

From McKinley Avenue south to Wisconsin Avenue, that becomes the sports-entertainment complex. You develop all around there because there's real estate that's underused. We'll have a covered plaza [connecting the new arena with the convention center], like in the airport with restaurants and retail. High-rise residential, an outdoor plaza, and this whole area becomes really a vibrant area. It's the new Millennium Park!

**How would this impact Grand Avenue mall?**

Grand Avenue is dead as far as retail is concerned. Downtown retail is dead inside malls. We didn't develop the distaste in Milwaukee – that's everywhere. Grand Avenue turns into residences, educational facilities, offices, and essentially a place for innovative businesses to start



out. We have very conservative capital in this town, so I think you just have to forget about that being a shopping center.

**How do you pay for this new sports-entertainment complex?**

There's a task force in place to review all of the cultural, entertainment and sports assets in Milwaukee. But we ought not to have competition between those venues for dollars to build it. If there's a need for multiple assets within Milwaukee – and to have to knock on the door of the Legislature – then they all ought to be participating in the end game of enhancing the sizzle of Milwaukee.

**Raising taxes is an uphill battle.**

There's been a reluctance to buy into that concept by the lunch-bucket taxpayer who doesn't get Downtown, who

doesn't buy tickets to events.

They have the view that unless they get a direct benefit out of it, they're not willing to pay for it. I think there should be an underlying sense of local pride for your hometown. But Milwaukee is a strange breed. They have this notion that the quality of life in Milwaukee is a secret to people outside. And almost like *Brigadoon* in a sense, if you get the word out, we're going to get people coming in here that aren't our kind of people. It'll change the mix and it won't be such a good place anymore. And that's not a good attitude to start with. It's hard to change attitudes.

**Wisconsin has been described as one of the most polarized states in the country.**

From the time that President Obama took office, the Republicans have not wanted him to

succeed. Sometimes, the interest of the public is put in second place to the interest of the competition between the parties. I look at Tommy Thompson when he was governor. I've always been a Democrat, but I voted for him. He genuinely, from the middle of his bones, wanted to be a representative of everybody. He wanted to be a governor for the inner city of Milwaukee, for organized labor, for the Elm Grove industrialists. There was a friendlier time when he was governor.

**As a Democrat, how do you reconcile representing Kelly Rindfleisch, a former Scott Walker Milwaukee County aide, who was ultimately convicted of felony misconduct for raising money on county time?**

I think she was a victim of the John Doe investigation and of the people that were running the John Doe. I have a loyalty to her as a client, as a human being that transcends my politics. Because I've represented people who were charged with child molestation, charged with murder, armed robbery, it doesn't mean I endorse murder, child molesting or robbery. I don't. I'm a great proponent of allowing anybody and everybody who is caught up in our justice system to have effective assistance of counsel.

**You can be a lightning rod for a lot of issues. You're 78. Why put up with it?**

I've got a passion for the city. I enjoy the action Downtown. And I've got a lot of stuff left to do. It's one adventure after another, and when my time comes to cash it in, nobody's going to be able to stand up at my funeral and say, "He left something behind that he didn't do." I'm going to try and do it all. ■