

Florida Powerhouse: Greenberg Traurig

By **Carolina Bolado**

Law360, Miami (July 14, 2014, 4:06 PM ET) -- In the nearly five decades since Greenberg Traurig LLP began in Miami, the firm has grown into one of the largest in the world while remaining a key player in its home base and helping drive the region's growth as an international business hub, earning it a spot on Law360's list of Florida Powerhouses.

From its beginnings as a small, entrepreneurial firm in Miami in 1967, Greenberg Traurig has become an international juggernaut with 1,750 attorneys in 36 offices around the globe. In Florida, the firm maintains seven offices with 331 attorneys who represent clients like Burger King Worldwide Inc, Lennar Corp., The Related Group of Florida and the Seminole Tribe of Florida.

"We are fortunate to have been 'born' in Florida, a state which has become increasingly important as a global business and cultural center," the firm's CEO Richard Rosenbaum said. "It is our original home, where we have deep roots, and we are the only firm with that home which has gone on to become the national and global platform which is today's Greenberg Traurig."

Greenberg Traurig has more offices in Florida than any other place in the country, which reflects the firm's commitment to the state, according to the firm's Co-president Hilarie Bass.

"I think what we're known for is representing the business community, and I think our local roots are reflected by virtue of the businesses we represent in each of the communities in the state," Bass said.

The firm's deep roots in the state are assets to clients, according to Bass, who said being able to tell a client that the firm's attorneys know the banker who will be doing the financing on a project or the county commissioners who will need to approve development adds value for businesses.

"Typically, it's not hard to solve a particular legal problem," Bass said. "The question is how you go about it in the most productive and efficient way for the client. I don't think out-of-state firms are quite as capable of providing that to their clients."

What made the firm successful in the beginning is a focus on finding hard-working and entrepreneurial attorneys who understand the business practices of their clients, according to firm Co-chairman Matt Gorson. Since then, he said, the firm has continued to reinforce that entrepreneurial and collaborative culture throughout all its offices worldwide.

One way the firm has managed to maintain its culture is by avoiding mergers and instead focusing on

expansion through the recruitment of lateral hires, either as individuals or small groups, Gorson said.

"If you're a single lawyer coming into a firm with 1,700 or 1,800 other lawyers, you want to fit into their culture, and our culture has always been one of collaboration," Gorson said.

Greenberg Traurig early on became a leader in real estate, which has always been a primary industry in South Florida, according to Gorson. He said the firm had become a leader in not just the buying and selling of land, but also in land use and zoning, and was the first to work on condominiums after the Florida Legislature passed a condominium law in 1973.

Real estate continues to be a huge part of the firm's Florida business. In the last two years, Greenberg Traurig worked on more than 50 condominium projects valued at more than \$6 billion. These include projects in Miami like SLS Brickell, Icon Bay and Paraiso Bay by the Related Group.

The firm also represented Swire Properties in the acquisition of land in Miami's urban core for the development of Brickell City Centre, one of the largest urban development projects in the country.

In Orlando, Greenberg Traurig attorneys worked with I Drive Line in connection with a \$150 million acquisition and financing for the redevelopment of a defunct Orlando entertainment attraction on International Drive.

Orlando Evora, the co-managing shareholder of the firm's Orlando office, said that development had returned very strong in Central Florida after the recession, particularly in the single-family home market.

"We're not restricted by any kind of geographic features, like water," Evora said. "I think South Florida is pretty hot with condos, but we're seeing more in terms of single-family development."

While the legal market has generally been dominated by real estate and tourism in the state, corporate attorneys are now seeing more work as Florida companies grow and mature. Transactional work, in particular, has been on the rise.

In the past two years, the firm has coordinated Burger King's public offering in a \$8.1 billion deal involving Burger King's merger with Justice Holdings Ltd. and also represented SBA Communications Corp., a wireless communications infrastructure company, in its \$1.5 billion purchase of TowerCo II Holdings LLC.

The firm's attorneys also helped Metropolitan Health Networks Inc. in its \$850 million sale to Humana Inc. In addition, Greenberg Traurig represented Azteca Acquisition Corp., a publicly traded special purpose acquisition company, in a \$400 million merger of Spanish-language media companies.

The transactional activity is projected to continue to rise thanks in part to an influx of hedge funds and private equity funds relocating to South Florida, where the lack of a state income tax is attractive to high-net-worth individuals. A number of large corporate companies are moving to the Sunshine State for similar reasons, according to partner Bruce March.

"In some respects for the hedge fund industry, South Florida has become sort of the sixth borough," March said.

The firm's litigators have won several major victories in recent months, including a favorable ruling that

was later affirmed by a state appeals court on behalf of homebuilders suing over allegedly defective Chinese-manufactured drywall.

Greenberg Traurig litigators also represented the owner of a floating home against the city of Riviera Beach in the U.S. Supreme Court. In January 2013, the court ruled that the floating home should not be treated as a vessel and that the city could not justify its destruction with maritime law.

The firm's Tampa office has been particularly busy in the litigation department, trying seven cases in 2013 with affirmative claims of more than \$150 million. The office primarily handles environmental litigation, including large toxic tort cases, and labor and employment litigation, according to Evora.

Evora added that the firm's Orlando and Tampa offices are currently trying to work together and create synergy between the two so as to create one large Central Florida office.

"We're only an hour away, and we're trying to market to both markets," Evora said. "We've taken the approach of not duplicating areas but to try to work together to grow our collective practices."

March said the firm is built on responding to needs in the community and has succeeded in Florida because as the state's economy grew, the firm built or developed the talent necessary to support the new industries.

"The lawyers here are particularly business-minded," March said. "The answer to a client isn't, 'You can't do that.' The answer is, 'Here's what you can do.' Clients want lawyers who know how to solve problems."

Despite being a large firm that spans several continents, March said that Greenberg Traurig has minimal bureaucracy and is flexible in response to changing markets. The leadership of the firm is encouraged to support the growth of individual practice groups, not to become an impediment, he said.

"There is an incredible sense of empowerment, giving the power to the attorneys around the world," March said. "There's a true sense of collaboration that I have never seen any place else that I've practiced law."

--Editing by Elizabeth Bowen and Katherine Rautenberg.