

California Powerhouse: Greenberg Traurig

By Craig Clough

Law360 (August 3, 2022, 2:03 PM EDT) --It wasn't just a string of wins in its corporate, transactional and litigation practices that made for an impressive year for Greenberg Traurig LLP in California. It also won arguably the most high-profile legal dispute of 2021 when its client Britney Spears was freed from a 13-year conservatorship.

The pop queen's efforts to break from the conservatorship controlled by her father made international headlines before a California judge ordered the conservatorship terminated in November, in what Greenberg Traurig's Mathew Rosengart praised as not just a victory for Spears, but also for her efforts to bring more attention to the issue of conservatorships.

Rosengart took Spears on as a client in July 2021, with the #FreeBritney movement backed by her fans already bringing worldwide attention to the case. By November, Rosengart and Greenberg Traurig had indeed freed Spears, a big reason why it was named as one of Law360's 2022 California Powerhouses.

"It was a great win, it came out exactly like we wanted, but there was a fair amount of public pressure for it to turn out that way as well," Jeff E. Scott, co-chair of Greenberg Traurig's global litigation practice, told Law360. "So the downside would have been quite bad if you jumped in there and you became the most recent person that Britney was accusing of not doing his or her job or turning out a lousy outcome for her."

The Spears victory came after more than two decades of growth for Greenberg Traurig in California, which handles much more than just entertainment cases. Its practice further covers litigation along with transactions in agriculture, intellectual property and real estate.

Over the past year, the firm in California represented retired Olympic speed skater Apolo Ohno in getting an investor suit dismissed that accused him of involvement in a cryptocurrency scam; Punchbowl News in beating a trademark infringement case in federal court; and video giant Blizzard Entertainment in getting a class action sent to arbitration over allegations the company's in-game "loot boxes" are illegal gambling.

The firm also helped client Medtronic, one of the largest medical device manufacturers in the world, get a federal suit over noncompete and nonsolicitation clauses in an employment agreement dismissed.



On the corporate and transactional front, the firm is the primary outside counsel for The Pokemon Co., helping it ink a content provider deal with Netflix and a comprehensive licensing deal with Universal Music Group. It also represented AFEX, a Los Angeles-based payments company the firm described as one of the world's largest non-bank cross-border payment solution providers, in a sale to FleetCor Technologies Inc.

"It was a really great deal and it took a really long time," Los Angeles-based Mark J. Kelson, co-chair of the firm's global corporate practice, told Law360. "There were a lot of regulatory approvals because when you're doing foreign exchange deals like this you have to get regulatory approvals. I think we were dealing with 12 or 14 different countries. We didn't do all of those countries because we don't have offices everywhere, but we did Mexico and Italy and Germany and a number of other places in Europe and North America as well as Asia."

Scott said he helped start the firm's Los Angeles office in 2000, when it had about eight attorneys and a brand he described as "pretty invisible on the West Coast."

Today, with nearly 2,000 attorneys in the country and more than 215 in California, Scott is a co-chair of Greenberg Traurig's litigation group and Kelson is co-chair of the firm's global corporate practice, Scott noted.

"So the fact that we are being honored by you folks as a Regional Powerhouse in California I think speaks to the progress we've made over 22 years in making a name for ourselves and recruiting the right people and building the brand, because we really were invisible in 2000 out here," he said.

G. Michelle Ferreira, who is co-managing shareholder of the firm's San Francisco and Silicon Valley offices, has a tax background, and she said the firm scored wins in its tax practice over the past year.

A victory she highlighted was the U.S. Tax Court's finding that a woman's estate is liable for tax on the \$2.2 million repayment value of money she advanced to cover her children's life insurance rather than the \$6.1 million cash surrender value of the policies.

"It was on the taxation of split-dollar life insurance for estate tax purposes and whether it was includable in the gross estate upon death, and we won on behalf of the client, so it was a pretty pivotal case," Ferreira told Law360.

Scott said a key to the firm's success is that "people don't own clients, so we never have a hard time getting the right person in the first jurisdiction to handle it, because they'll get credit. It's not like some of the big firms where somebody's owned a client for 30 years. We freely share credit; it's a way to incentivize people to provide help where they can."

Ferreira said when she started co-managing the San Francisco office, it had about eight attorneys, but has grown to around 50. She also said the spirit of collaboration helps drive Greenberg Traurig's wins.

"So a lot of the reasons people come to the firm is they don't have the expertise that we do," she said. "We have all kinds of expertise, even in weird stuff. I mean, somebody once sent out, 'Do we have somebody that knows about preserving dinosaur egg fossils in a foreign country?' I don't remember where exactly, it was somewhere in Africa. And then within minutes a person wrote back and said, 'I have a person.' That's what attracts people to GT. Their clients need a sub-specialty. They might need FDA approval, they might need tax, they might need data privacy."

Kelson said he's been with the firm for 11 years, and he thinks "the reason we've been able to grow the practice so significantly is because we have very deep resources, we're an extremely collaborative firm, we have teams across different disciplines that work together in pretty much a seamless fashion, and I think inwardly we're very collaborative and outwardly we're partners to our clients."

--Additional reporting by Theresa Schliep and Lauren Berg. Editing by Adam LoBelia.

All Content © 2003-2022, Portfolio Media, Inc.