

Pennsylvania Powerhouse: Morgan Lewis & Bockius

By Emma Cueto

Law360, New York (September 29, 2017, 7:24 PM EDT) -- Morgan Lewis & Bockius LLP's Pennsylvania attorneys have recently racked up a series of impressive wins, including a victory for Uber in an antitrust suit and an appellate victory for Morgan Stanley, as well as the firm's handling of major transactions such as the \$1.4 billion sale of cable company MetroCast.

More than 140 years after its founding in Philadelphia, Morgan Lewis & Bockius now boasts 30 offices around the world, but it hasn't lost its strong presence in its home state of Pennsylvania, where it remains a go-to firm for industries old and new and has earned a spot as one of Law360's Pennsylvania Powerhouses for the third time.

The firm's Philadelphia office is home to 296 attorneys, with an additional 35 Pennsylvania attorneys in Pittsburgh. Current clients for the Pennsylvania offices include marquee names such as the University of Pennsylvania, Exelon Corp. and Merck & Co. Inc.

Philadelphia managing partner Timothy Levin told Law360 that the firm stresses a collaborative approach that helps Morgan Lewis succeed.

"We try very hard not to have any 'silos,'" Levin said. "And so we focus on working collaboratively with each other in the office and across offices. It really facilitates having a number of extraordinary practices that function very well globally."

Levin said that he works hard to foster a culture of openness and collaboration not just in Philadelphia, but between his attorneys and all Morgan Lewis lawyers worldwide, explaining that "the tone is set at the top."

"I think that on the one hand, you see a very large global law firm that is doing all manner of major client work, both in Philadelphia and around the world," Levin said. "But it's very much one of those places where doors are open and you can easily feel like you know everybody in the building. It's an extremely collegial place."

Philadelphia partner Sarah Bouchard said the emphasis on teamwork also wins cases.



Bouchard headed up the team representing Morgan Stanley in a case brought by a former employee. Along with New York partner Andrew Schaffran and other members of the Philadelphia team, Bouchard helped convince first the district court and later the Sixth Circuit that the employee did not qualify as a whistleblower because he never attempted to share his concerns outside the company.

The suit is one of the cases that established a circuit split on whether employees who only report alleged misconduct internally count as whistleblowers under the Dodd-Frank Act.

Bouchard said that Morgan Lewis' collaborative culture guided how her team handled the case.

"We tried to approach it from a teamwork perspective, so people are providing their pieces and insight," she said.

Morgan Lewis is currently attempting to block the employee's attempt to bring the issue before the Financial Industry Regulatory Authority and his motion to set aside the appellate decision.

The firm has also seen other appellate victories in the past year, including overturning a \$20 million verdict against Zimmer Inc. over an artificial knee product. But the office has also found success outside the courtroom as well, handling major business transactions.

In the past year, Morgan Lewis represented FMC Corp. as it secured financing for its acquisition of the agricultural products division of DuPont USA, and a Philadelphia partner headed up the team that helped handle the \$1.4 billion sale of MetroCast from Harron Communications LP to Atlantic Broadband.

The office also represented AmeriGas, a UGI Corp. subsidiary and Morgan Lewis' oldest business transaction client, in a tender offer for its senior notes. The company is the sort of client Morgan Lewis prides itself on having, Levin said. It's also not the only major company that has stayed with Morgan Lewis for decades and looks to the firm for a variety of legal needs, he said.

In addition to these type of legacy clients, startups are also a sweet spot for the firm, according to Levin.

"We have many lawyers who are integrated in the startup culture in the region," he said.

The firm has retained by major technology companies and more established startups such as Uber Technologies Inc. The firm represented the ride-hailing service in an antitrust suit brought by Philadelphia Taxi Association Inc. and successfully had the case tossed.

In addition to its client work, Morgan Lewis prides itself on its pro bono work in the region as well. The firm has a "unique historical connection" to the community, Levin said.

"We place a very strong emphasis on our community involvement here. Our pro bono accomplishments are in many ways at least as impressive as our client accomplishments," he said.

All Pennsylvania attorneys are encouraged to participate in the pro bono program, according to Levin, and the firm's numbers show that encouragement has gotten results. Ninety-eight percent of Philadelphia attorneys and 100 percent of the Pittsburgh office have done pro bono work in the past year, with the vast majority logging more than 20 hours a year.

Among its recent causes, the firm is currently working to help a Syrian family whose daughter is being treated for cancer in Philadelphia to gain asylum, obtaining an expedited asylum review, and securing asylum for the mother and youngest daughter. The family's push for asylum is ongoing.

In addition to a focus on winning cases, both pro bono and for clients, the firm also emphasizes mentoring young attorneys and works to retain lawyers throughout their careers.

Bouchard, who has been with Morgan Lewis since she started as a summer associate in 1994, said she had many mentors at the firm when she was starting out, which helped her grow as an attorney.

"I love it here," she said. "You get pushed to be your very best, but people really appreciate that you have a life outside of work. Even though we all work hard, we all take care of each other and respect each other."

Creating an enjoyable work environment is a major priority at the firm, Levin stressed. As a result, he said it isn't uncommon for attorneys to spend their whole careers with Morgan Lewis.

"Many of our lawyers here in Philadelphia are what we call 'Morgan Lewis lifers,'" Levin said. "And when they retire, it's amazing to hear the stories about how, on the one hand, life in a law firm has changed over a 35-, 45-, 50-year career. And yet you also hear how many of the same things remain important, and remain consistent over time."

Values such as a focus on client service, an expectation of legal excellence and being involved in the community have endured at the firm for decades, Levin said.

Morgan Lewis began as a legal partnership between Philadelphia native Charles Eldridge Morgan Jr. and Boston-born Francis Draper Lewis in 1873. A third partner, Morris Rex Bockius, joined in the 1880s. The firm quickly established itself in the region, going on to represent local banks and the nation's first public utility, United Gas Improvement Co., whose subsidiaries are still clients.

Nearly a century and a half after it was founded, Morgan Lewis continues to hold a place as one of the preeminent Pennsylvania firms with roots in the community and a client roster that reflects old and new Pennsylvania industries. Despite its lengthy history, the firm also isn't afraid to innovate, Bouchard said.

"We already work at a high level, but in order to be competitive in this new legal environment, you need to be anticipating disruption and competition, even when things are great," Bouchard said. "And our firm is really good at that. No one just sits on our laurels."

Levin said the firm is constantly evaluating its practices, looking for ways to improve, and is currently focused on improving diversity and finding new ways to utilize technology.

"I think we adapt and stay competitive because we're willing to step back and look at what we're doing and what we could be doing better," he said. "If you maintain a focus on delivering the best service to serve your clients, and are willing to step back and not assume the way you're doing things is the single best way to do it, that's the way to stay at the front."

--Editing by Katherine Rautenberg.

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