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SSRGA

SCHWARTZ SLADKUS REICH GREENBERG ATLAS LLP

BRINGING DECADES OF EXPERIENCE TO A YOUNG LAW FIRM

A Young Law Firm with Old-School Service Hits the Ground Running



Partners Jeffrey Reich, Jeffrey Schwartz and Steven Sladkus with SSRGA attorneys

When 32 experienced lawyers left their old firm to start up a new one, there were fewer stumbling blocks and more skipping stones to success.

By Debra Hazel

One of the youngest real estate-oriented law firms in New York City is also one of the most experienced, and growing quickly.

Just two years old, Schwartz Sladkus Reich Greenberg Atlas LLP (SSRGA) was founded by a core group of attorneys who had been with their previous firm for more than two decades. Seeking to focus on and expand its real estate, health care and other practice areas, SSRGA spun itself off with 32 attorneys in 2015.

“Although any transition is difficult, ours went better than we ever could have expected. Our clients followed us and we have continued to grow and expand from day one,” said managing partner Jeffrey M. Schwartz.

Representing clients in all five New York City boroughs, Westchester and Long Island, SSRGA’s core is real estate, focusing on both transactions and litigation, working with developers, operators, family real estate businesses and investors. The real estate work includes acquisition, financings, development and offering-plan work. Additionally, its cooperative and condominium practice is

among the largest in the city. It also has a health care practice, which is among the most well-regarded in New York (among other states), plus attorneys whose practice areas include corporate, trusts and estates, matrimonial, employment, intellectual property and not-for-profit law.

“Our approach to every transaction is both creative and practical, based on smarts and old-fashioned common sense,” Schwartz said.

“The real estate practice is both transactional and litigation oriented. One complements the other as we know exactly what to expect if litigation is required,” said Jeffrey S. Reich, a founding partner of the firm, who represents some of the largest condominium and cooperative developments in the United States.

With regard to litigation, SSRGA handles all aspects of different types of cases, from the initial filing of a summons to the ultimate prosecution or defense, including all discovery, motion practice, trial and appellate work. Clients include cooperatives and condominium associations and their boards, homeowner associations, developers, tenant associations and individuals. The

firm’s litigation department has an emphasis on construction defect cases from both the owner’s and contractor’s sides, plus contract disputes, liability and insurance claims, disputes with and between unit owners, mortgage and mechanic’s lien foreclosures; mold and other toxic cases, board election disputes and housing discrimination.

Yet despite its extensive expertise in litigation, the firm tries to avoid that route whenever possible. “We try to be proactive and give advice to avoid litigation,” said Steven Sladkus, another of SSRGA’s founding partners.

Most important, however, is creating and maintaining strong, cost-effective relationships with its clients, keeping lines of communication open throughout all stages of a matter so as to ensure that the attorneys understand the clients’ goals as they continue to evolve. The firm produces a regular newsletter that offers news and even advice for clients.

“We know how to relate to our clients, and continually nurture those relationships,” Schwartz said. “Our goal is to maintain long and productive relationships that lead to continued representation on all types

of matters.” The firm also is careful to staff each case with the best attorneys qualified to handle matters at the lowest hourly rate. “We are very involved with our clients from top to bottom, but we are careful not to overstaff,” Schwartz said. “You won’t have four lawyers on every matter.”

Since opening in May 2015, the firm has added other lawyers and practice areas: employment, matrimonial and intellectual property. The intellectual property practice includes clearing, securing, enforcing and defending trademark and other intellectual property rights in the United States, as well as throughout the world, through an extensive network of associated foreign counsel.

The attorneys are also involved in efforts outside the firm’s legal work. Sladkus is a revolving member of the Cooperative and Condominium Committee of the Association of the Bar of the City of New York and is also co-chairman of the Cooperative and Condominium Committee of the Real Property Law Section of the New York State Bar Association. Schwartz is also a revolving member of the New York City Bar Association’s Cooperative and Condominium Committee and a frequent lecturer on residential, commercial and leasing

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transactions. Mindy Stern, another partner, whose practice is primarily in the real estate, estate planning and estate administration areas, is chair of the Real Property Law Section of the New York State Bar Association and a member of the executive committee. Many of the firm’s partners also teach at a number of law schools, including the Benjamin N. Cardozo School of Law and Tulane University. The firm also is frequently called upon by clients’ insurers to defend claims commenced against them, and is a frequent presence in the media, being called upon to respond to questions in *The New York Times*, *New York Post* and various real estate publications.

On the philanthropic side, SSRGA has made a commitment to charity, with many of its partners serving on the boards of organizations, including the Catalog for Giving of NYC, Make-A-Wish Foundation and Playwrights Horizons.

“We’ve always been very cognizant of trying to give back to the community, with a large focus on New York City’s children,” Sladkus said.

Most recently, the firm has partnered with ArtsConnection, a charitable organization that provides learning experiences through the arts to children facing educational and life challenges. In June, the firm is hosting an exhibition of 25 original works of art from New York City public school students in grades 6 to 12.

SSRGA’s lease expires in March 2019, and the firm is already searching for more space, as growth plans continue. “We’re always looking to take on new talent and expand our practice areas,” Sladkus said.

Just two years along, the firm’s founders are already well on their way to fulfilling the goals of establishing a practice and taking pride in having their names on the door. Its mission statement refers to serving clients with loyalty and integrity, “in a corporate culture characterized by hard work, respect and dignity for all, non-egotism, fairness and a sense of humor.”

“We’ve always wanted to create a firm that does two things. First, offer our clients top-notch legal services and second, create an environment where all of our attorneys and staff enjoy coming to work each day,” Schwartz said. “We are very proud to say that in a short time we have done just that.”

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