Axinn, Veltrop & Harkrider

With just 57 attorneys, Axinn, Veltrop & Harkrider has become a major midsize brand by defending generic drug makers and big-name clients like Google Inc. in intellectual property and antitrust litigation and in merger investigations.

Its mix of technical prowess—"Many of our attorneys also have extensive economics and intellectual property backgrounds," said managing partner James Veltrop—and nuts-and-bolts trial lawyering enable its attorneys to break down complex facts for judges and juries. Axinn's secret to winning technical cases is "a team that has a grasp on the technology. These members provide guidance to our trial lawyers when preparing the case," partner Francis Morrison III said.

That strategy of the Hartford-based firm recently was put to the test. Morrison and Axinn attorneys John Tanski and Matthew Murphy joined Seattle local counsel Brian Esler at Miller Nash in a down-to-the-wire victory that prevented health care benefit and payment card provider Evolution1 Inc. from losing a valuable contract with benefit administrator Flex-Plan Services Inc.

Flex-Plan sued Evolution1 in November 2013, claiming a material breach of the parties' exclusive contract. Evolution1 fought back, arguing that an early termination would cause irreparable harm.

On New Year's Eve, a Washington state court issued a preliminary injunction requiring Flex-Plan to continue working with Evolution1 in 2014. Flex-Plan agreed to a seven-figure buyout a few days later. Forty-eight hours after Flex-Plan produced those documents, Morrison said, the firm used them in a reply brief to argue that Flex-Plan was feigning complex technical issues to get a better price. "We were able to take what could be a fairly abstruse issue and explain it in a manner that the judge could see what had happened and why it was important," Esler said. Opposing counsel William Kinzel did not return calls. —SHERRY KABARE

Berger Singerman

Job-hunting lawyers interested in joining Berger Singerman learn up front what not to do. There are two ways to get fired from the firm, said co-chairman Paul Steven Singerman. The first involves lying. "The second way to get fired is what we refer to as internally competitive conduct, as opposed to collaborative conduct," Singerman said.

Plenty of law firms claim to foster teamwork and collaboration, but Berger Singerman backs it up by tying lawyer compensation to how well its lawyers work together and advance the interest of the firm as a whole, rather than focusing on their own practices and clients. Lawyer salaries are based on three factors: productivity, fee origination and "corporate citizenship," which refers to a lawyer's willingness to be a team player.

"We will compete aggressively in courtrooms, boardrooms and in the marketplace for new matters, but once you walk through the door of each of our offices, we've chosen to embrace a collaborative approach," Singerman said.

The approach seems to be resonating with clients. The firm has grown steadily from a solo practice established in 1985 by Mitchell Berger to a four-office operation across Florida with a reputation for doing high-end corporate and bankruptcy work. "They do big-firm quality work in a smaller shop," said Akerman Senterfitt partner Michael Goldberg, who has worked with Berger Singerman for years on the bankruptcy of law firm Rothstein Rosenfeld Adler in the aftermath of Scott Rothstein's $1.2 billion Ponzi scheme.

The firm represents the unsecured creditors of Taylor Bean & Whitaker Mortgage Corp. in the largest pending bankruptcy case in Florida, with an estimated $5 billion in claims. It also represents Lender Processing Services Inc. in a series of suits tied to so-called "robosigning," and helped the company reach a $127 million settlement with attorneys general in 46 states. —KAREN SLOAN
Bernstein Litowitz
Berger & Grossmann

Be choosy and be ready. That's the business strategy. Bernstein Litowitz Berger & Grossmann partner Gerald Silk said the firm has employed from the start. It is highly selective in the cases it handles—and it's prepared to try them all.

Known for its successful representation of institutional investors in shareholder and investor litigation, the 31-year-old firm counts $25 billion as recovered for clients and has racked up precedent-setting corporate-governance reforms, all while working on a 100 percent contingency-fee basis.

A new-matters committee reviews all potential cases for the New York firm following rigorous analysis and investigation of the facts by private investigators and financial analysts on staff. "Everyone at the firm weighs in—from junior to midlevel associates and the way up to the management committee, and one partner can often veto a case," Silk said.

Among the firm's 2013 wins was a $730 million recovery against Citigroup Inc. in a securities class action arising out of a financial restatement during the subprime meltdown. Bernstein Litowitz served as sole lead counsel in the companion case representing bond and preferred-stock investors.

The firm litigated the case for four years in New York federal court before Judge Sidney Stein, fighting motions to dismiss and handling more than 70 depositions. The case was settled in the third quarter of 2013. Kessler Topaz Meltzer & Check and Foskowitz also worked on the matter as additional counsel for the class. Requests for comment from opposing counsel Paul, Weiss, Rifkind, Wharton & Garrison and Skadden, Arps, Slate, Meagher & Flom were not answered.

—SHERRY KARAEN

FIRM FACTS:
- Year founded: 1983
- Headquarters: New York
- Total attorneys: 135
- Partners: 16
- Associates: 24

Bowles Rice

With 138 lawyers and counting, Bowles Rice may soon grow itself out of the category of mid-sized law firms.

If and when it does, the firm based in Charleston, Va., will have the revived energy industry in the Appalachian Basin to thank.

"The energy industry is going great guns right now," managing partner Thomas Heywood said in an interview. "Some of the most abundant and secure reserves are right here in our region."

Bowles Rice has eight offices—five in West Virginia and one each in Kentucky, Pennsylvania and Virginia—with active plans to open a ninth office in Ohio.

That geographic spread coincides closely with the southern half of the Marcellus and Utica shale formations, where a boom in natural gas exploration is underway.

That in turn has breathed new life into local manufacturing and other business areas that had suffered for decades. With that growth comes ownership and employment disputes, environmental regulation and litigation. Controversial "fracking" practices have made headlines nationwide.

Bowles Rice has done legal work and lobbying for the energy industry since 1920, so it was well situated to ride the wave of the energy boom.

"Coal, oil, gas and banking—we've been based in those industries since the beginning," said Heywood, a Harvard Law School graduate and former chief of staff to a West Virginia governor.

One recent victory for the firm came in April, when an Ohio court ruled for Bowles Rice clients in a dispute over the validity of century-old oil and gas leases that were invoked to explore for natural gas.

"An entirely new economy is being created," said Heywood. "And we're only in the first inning."

—TONY MAURO

FIRM FACTS:
- Year founded: 1920
- Total attorneys: 138
- Partners: 63
- Associates: 39

Coblentz Patch Duffy & Bass

Don't let Coblentz Patch Duffy & Bass' 124-year history fool you. With almost twice as many partners and 50 percent of the firm's associates are women. One of the firm's three managing partners is a woman. Women also serve as co-chairs in each of the firm's major practice groups, and they head a number of the firm's committees.

Coblentz Patch seeks out top talent and community-minded individuals regardless of gender. "The way we retain and promote young attorneys is with a collaborative and interesting practice," managing partner Danza Kozerski said. Likewise, the firm places significant value on pro bono and other service—not only to give back to the community but also to nurture job satisfaction. "Part of our strategy is that we hire whole people. We have whole people working here as lawyers," name partner Pamela Duffy said.

The firm and its members have received a number of awards for volunteer work, including the 2013 Outstanding Law Firm in Public Service Award from San Francisco Bar Association's Justice and Diversity Center.

The firm's core practices are in real estate and commercial litigation, with additional strengths in corporate services, estate planning and tax. Firm leaders say that its partner-to-associate ratio—at 2-1—helps prevent oversstaffing and enables clients to work closely with partners. The strategy helps attract complex work, often in sports and cultural matters. For example, the firm landed a $2.7 billion development project involving California Pacific Medical Center in San Francisco.

As lead real estate and corporate counsel to the San Francisco 49ers, the firm guided its National Football League client through development of the team's new $1.3 billion stadium in Santa Clara, Calif.

—Teresa Wall-Cys

FIRM FACTS:
- Year founded: 1890
- Headquarters: San Francisco
- Total attorneys: 76
- Partners: 45
- Associates: 23
Cohen Milstein Sellers & Toll recently spun its skills and experience into two new practice areas and a merger to expand a multimillion-dollar winning formula. "We’ve tried to grow in ways that are organic, from areas in which we had already accomplished some success and not to just add on areas that are foreign to us," said Joseph Sellers, chairman of the firm’s executive committee.

The class action firm has added a public-client practice, working with state attorneys general and other public sector clients, and a whistleblower-False Claims Act practice for a total of 13 practices. Just this year, it merged with the small but potent Leopold Law in Palm Beach Gardens, Fla., which brought practices in products liability, catastrophic injury and other complex litigation, with Cohen Milstein offering multipar-ty-litigation tools in return. Those steps, Sellers said, allow the 82-lawyer firm to draw on "the same sets of skills and knowledge we’ve been litigating in a host of areas elsewhere."

Its efforts paid off big in the past year. In March 2013, firm partners Karen Handorf and Michelle Yau—with co-counsel Lowey Dannenberg Cohen & Hart; Wolf Haldenstein Adler Freeman & Herz; Bernstein Liebhard; and Kessler Topaz Meltzer & Check—settled a fraud case related to investor Bernard Madoff for $219 million. That June, the firm’s Steven Toll and Julie Reiser, on behalf of several public-employee retirement systems, entered a $500 million settlement in the mortgage-backed securities class action against Countrywide Financial Corp. and others.

“We have talented lawyers who understand that complex litigation is rarely resolved in the short term and who work relentlessly on behalf of our clients,” Reiser said.

A month later, after a jury verdict in their favor in the In re Urethane Antitrust Litigation price-fixing class action, the firm’s Kit Pierson, Richard Kofman, Christopher Cormier, Sharon Robertson and Laura Alexander, with co-lead counsel Fine, Kaplan and Black of Philadelphia, won a final judgment of more than $1 billion against The Dow Chemical Co., now under appeal.

—Marcia Coyle

"We’ve tried to grow in ways that are organic, from areas in which we had already accomplished some success." —JOSEPH SELLERS

FIRM FACTS:
- Year founded: 1986
- Headquarters: Washington
- Total attorneys: 82
- Partners: 33
- Associates: 31

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Davis & Gilbert

Davis & Gilbert uses a make-to-order strategy—both inside and out.

The firm handpicks lateral associates with a few years of key experience and offers multiple titles and paths, chairman Ronald Urbach said. The menu of options helps the firm retain valuable lawyers, some of whom opt out of the partnership track, he said.

“There’s a philosophy of being creative as to how one can try to retain people over time and allow them to progress and, at the same time, run a business,” Urbach said. Key clients include Verizon Wireless, Nike Inc. and Pantera Bread Co.

Davis & Gilbert attorneys’ deep understanding of their clients’ industries is what sets them apart, said Philip Palazzo, president of Palazzo Investment Bankers, a client that focuses on marketing and media deals.

“What makes them strong is not just the heritage and legacy; it’s the folks they have today that run the various practices,” Palazzo said. Among its more unusual tasks, the firm advised J.M. Smucker Co. on its first Olympic sponsorship of Team USA, including the Paralympic teams, for this year’s winter games in Sochi, Russia, and the 2016 summer games in Rio de Janeiro.

To boost a cooperative spirit within the firm, Davis & Gilbert has established industry groups for sectors like financial services, hospitality and retail that include lawyers from different practice specialties. Last year, the firm rolled out industry-focused training to keep everyone up to speed on rapid advertising and marketing industry changes as companies adopt new technology. Lawyers have given internal talks to their peers about legal issues concerning digital marketing and digital advertising and tax issues affecting marketing, for example. “Last year I would view as being a watershed year in making sure that we are all ultimately on the leading edge where our clients are,” Urbach said.

—SHERI QUARTERS

FIRM FACTS:

- Year founded: 1906
- Headquarters: New York
- Total attorneys: 112
- Partners: 57
- Associates: 47

Davis Graham & Stubbs

Davis Graham & Stubbs is a well-known firm for handling legal matters for companies in the natural resources sector, but it’s thrived by developing its own resources—including a diverse team and project-management prowess.

“My goal is to have energized lawyers who act like owners,” managing partner Chris Richardson said. The firm strives for age and gender diversity and is 32 percent female at the partnership level. “I want [all partners] to think they have the ability to develop and structure the practice they want that meets the needs of their clients and their family,” Richardson said.

To meet clients’ cost needs, the Denver-based firm started budgeting its services for them about five years ago. A couple of years ago, Davis Graham adopted a project-management approach in order to budget different stages of a client’s matter, he said.

Transactional work stages, for example, include due diligence and obtaining federal antitrust approvals for the deal, he said.

Lawyers work with the firm’s finance professionals to manage the projects. The goal is to give clients a solid cost estimate and manage to that number, Richardson said.

The firm focuses on corporate work and transactions, and litigation for natural resources companies, including mining and energy. Technology sector work is on the upswing, Richardson said.

In April, it won a $43.1 million verdict for Mansfield, Mass., software application company SolidFX LLC in a Colorado federal court breach-of-contract case against The Boeing Co. subsidiary Jeppesen Sanderson Inc. Jeppesen spokesman Mike Pound said the company strongly disagrees with the verdict and plans an appeal.

SolidFX president Dona Flammie said the two lawyers who worked on her company’s case were very hands-on and organized. “Everybody was on the same page all the time,” Flammie said. —SHERI QUARTERS

FIRM FACTS:

- Year founded: 1915
- Headquarters: Denver
- Total attorneys: 145
- Partners: 66
- Associates: 48

Farella Braun + Martel

Farella Braun + Martel may be midsize, but its legal service offerings cover a broad array of niche practices and industries.

“Every client is a bit different in what they’re looking for and in what kind of arrangements they need,” firm chairman Steve Lowenthal said.

The custom-tailoring approach helps the San Francisco-based firm and its St. Helena, Calif., office market to an unusual clientele, including the wine industry and clean technology. Farella, with 131 lawyers, is also known for handling a range of practices, such as family wealth, business and white-collar litigation, environmental law, construction, insurance coverage and employment.

As varied as its practices are, it also strives to diversify its personnel. Five of the last seven associates promoted to partner fell into at least one of these categories: women, minorities or lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender.

Farella creates formal client teams from different practices for clients like Dell Inc. of Round Rock, Texas, the teams meet regularly so all the lawyers can work efficiently on the client’s matters and learn of key issues, Lowenthal said.

The firm handles commercial and patent litigation, trademark and antitrust work for Dell, said Laura Coleman, Dell’s vice president of litigation, patent and trademark.

“Farella lawyers work closely with our in-house team from day one to evaluate a matter and set an early strategy,” Coleman said.

The client teams are part of a client-focused strategy that includes Farella’s long-standing use of client interview and feedback sessions.

The idea is to understand client goals and needs—not just to stay up to date but to move ahead,” Lowenthal said. —SHERI QUARTERS

FIRM FACTS:

- Year founded: 1962
- Headquarters: San Francisco
- Total attorneys: 131
- Partners: 76
- Associates: 50
Hawkins Parnell Thackston & Young

Hawkins Parnell Thackston & Young runs a debt-free, cash-and-carry style of business that has set its course for strong growth.

The firm jumped from 135 attorneys in 2012 to 148 now, for a nearly 10 percent increase. Since 2010, the firm added offices in Austin, San Francisco, St. Louis and New York, driven by existing client need. It has other offices in Charleston, S.C.; Dallas; Los Angeles; and its headquarters in Atlanta.

Founded by trial lawyers Joseph Freeman Jr. and Paul Hawkins, the firm has deep roots in toxic tort and environmental litigation. It offers 17 practice areas, and the firm’s strategy is to intermingle its departments. Los Angeles partner Claire Weglarz prefers this model because, “when you need to put a team together, you know you’ve worked with these people before.” Recent additions include labor and employment and business litigation.

Many of Hawkins Parnell’s lawyers came to the firm with experience gained in bigger law firms such as Lewis Brisbois Bisgaard & Smith. Now, according to the Atlanta office’s partner-in-charge, Ronald Polly Jr., those lawyers can deliver services at a more effective rate for the client.

“But we compete on product, not on price,” he said. Likewise, the firm closely controls costs—no first-class travel, for example—which keeps it operating in the black. The strategy paid off even during the financial downturn—the firm had no layoffs. Among its recent wins: Partners Robert Thackston and Weglarz were part of the team that scored a defense verdict in Sildel v. Air & Liquid Systems Corp., a mesothelioma case with $20 million in damages on the line. Opposing counsel did not respond to a request for comment.

—Terisa Wall-Clybourn

Our cost structure is such that we have a lower price for our clients, but we compete on product, not on price.” —Ronald Polly Jr.

Firm Facts:
- Year founded: 1963
- Headquarters: Atlanta
- Total attorneys: 148
- Partners: 72
- Associates: 66

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Levenfeld Pearlstein

Transparency is the secret at Levenfeld Pearlstein. Partners and employees know each other’s compensation—right down to the staff. The firm uses a 360-degree review process in which any employee can review any partner and provide feedback about every department in the firm. The results are shared among members.

The strategy is intended to motivate firm attorneys and, in turn, provide better client service. “My fellow partners are asked whether I assist them with their clients’ needs, and I’m also rated on whether I strive to create opportunities for others at the firm,” managing partner Robert Romanoff said. “Our goal is to get the practice groups working together so that a client doesn’t only have a relationship with one particular partner or group.”

The firm offers alternative fee arrangements, but Romanoff said it is able to reduce clients’ overall legal spend while increasing value without them. “Just reducing the bills is not enough,” Romanoff said. The approach has attracted such clients as Harbor Group International LLC. Levenfeld represented one of its affiliates in the $94 million sale of the Burnham Center office tower in Chicago. For clients like Barnett Capital Ltd., the firm has developed extraneous that allow them to have real-time access to documents. It cuts down on the need to call the firm for assistance.

“They actually approached us about the project, suggesting that we could use it to manage litigation and docket,” said Elani Perez, general counsel and managing director at Barnett. “They came in, sat with us and discussed what we wanted and then came up with a solution.”

He added, “We did not pay for anything, and really it would have been more lucrative for them to bill us every time we had a question, but instead they were more concerned about being a partner with us.”

—Sherry Kararin

Lieff Cabraser Heimann & Bernstein

With seven practice groups ranging from injury torts and antitrust to employment and the False Claims Act, Lieff Cabraser Heimann & Bernstein has the breadth to go after some of the biggest companies in the world. “We have one of the most diverse plaintiff-side practices in the country,” managing partner Steven Fineman said.

Since its founding in 1972, the firm has recovered more than $91 billion in verdicts and settlements on behalf of classes, groups and individuals, he said. It works almost exclusively on a contingency-fee basis.

“We don’t have as many lawyers as the firms opposing us, so we can’t devote dozens of attorneys to a single case,” Fineman said. “We have to focus on efficiently and aggressively advancing our case.”

Fineman chairs a six-person executive committee that selects the cases, taking into account the facts, legal and financial viability, and the client. Trial technology experts, financial analysts and investigators also weigh in. Once it accepts a case, the firm is prepared to litigate to the end, Fineman said.

In 2011, Lieff Cabraser, along with other plaintiffs firms, filed a major employee class action against Apple Inc., Google Inc., Intel Corp. and others. The antitrust suit, led by partners Kelly Demody and Brendan Glackin, alleged the companies conspired not to recruit each other’s employees. In July, Intuit Inc., Lucafilm Ltd. and Pixar entered into two settlements totaling $20 million. The agreement with the four other companies is awaiting approval. “Our firm is really attracted to cases where there are complex issues and no easy answer;” Demody said. None of the defense firms responded to messages seeking comment.

—Sherry Kararin

Liner

When Stuart Liner needs to talk to a partner, he sends an email or walks into his or her office. But meetings? Forget it.

“I can’t remember the last time we had an all-hands-on partners meeting,” said Liner, managing partner of Liner LLP in Los Angeles. “Our view of it is that we don’t want to create bureaucracy. We want to be able to be nimble and make quick decisions.”

Despite its 64-attorney size, Liner LLP represents some big clients, including Mianran Film Corp., Lions Gate Entertainment Corp. and Hilton Grand Vacations Co. The firm, whose traditional practice areas include real estate and entertainment work, has a new focus on consumer class actions, particularly those involving the labeling of food.

“A new sensitivity to food health and labeling and safety” since the recession have prompted plaintiffs lawyers to file more suits in the area, said Liner partner Angela Agrusa.

Last year, the firm obtained dismissal of a dispute over the labeling of Silk as soy milk. It also successfully excluded an expert witness for the plaintiffs who challenged claims that Horizon organic milk promotes “brain health.”

“My philosophy on litigation is if you get into a fight, do everything you need to win it,” said Roger Thedorein, general counsel of The WhiteWave Foods Co., which makes both products.

“These guys—were they at a 1,000 lawyer-firm or 60-member firm, I’d go to the same people because they’re good at what they do,” he said.

Since the recession, the firm has renewed its focus on cutting costs to keep its profit margins above 50 percent, while dedicating 15 percent of its work to alternative or contingency-fee assignments. The firm also has added in new businesses or in its own clients, Liner said.

—Amanda Bronstad
Morrison Cohen

Morrison Cohen’s flat organizational structure gives it a solid foundation to handle work for the heavyweights. With a nearly equal ratio of partners to nonpartners and a steady headcount, the 95-lawyer firm doesn’t expect to grow beyond 115 attorneys, chairman David Scherl said. Partners at the one-office New York firm also keep billings on an even keel, in the mid-$400 to mid-$600 range.

That undercuts competitors in the firm’s largest practice areas: corporate capital markets, including representing private-equity sponsors and investment funds, followed by commercial litigation.

“We’re staffing differently, we’re billing differently. The attorneys are able to sell that because we’re focused on senior-level attention,” chairman David Scherl said.

Advising North Castle Partners of Greenwich, Conn., on its November purchase of Jenny Craig from Nestlé S.A., was one of its prominent deals of late. In another, announced in December, the firm advised Greenwich private-equity shop Littlejohn & Co. on its purchase of information-technology company Hostway Corp.

Representing several dozen private-equity clients is a “holy grail” practice because work extends through the life of a fund, Scherl said.

The firm helps clients create funds, buy portfolio companies, do the portfolio companies’ day-to-day corporate counsel work and sell the companies.

“They’re working at a midcap firm and bringing a largecap mentality,” said Stephen Pierce, global head of equity capital markets at Goldman, Sachs & Co. Pierce said the firm’s work for Goldman includes underwriting and litigation.


Morrison Cohen pulls upscale work partly by keeping all partners apprised of a wide range of firm financial information, Scherl said. All partners know what everyone is contributing to the firm and their compensation. “It’s empowering, but it’s also motivating,” Scherl said.

—Sheri Quarters

“We’re staffing differently, we’re billing differently. The attorneys are able to sell that because we’re focused on senior-level attention.” —David Scherl

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Much Shelist

With vigorous corporate, real estate and litigation practices, Much Sheilist is snagging work once handled by firms 10 or even 20 times its size.

Managing partner Mitchell Roth said Much Shelist has taken advantage of opportunities created by the recession, when in-house counsel became increasingly price sensitive. “They now have legal budgets—and not everything is ‘bet the farm,’” Roth said. In hiring his firm’s clients “get a sophisticated work product and high level of service at a fraction of what they were paying before.” Billing rates are about 35 to 40 percent less than Am Law 100 firms, Roth said, although he stressed that’s not what Much Shelist relies on to sell its services. He describes firm lawyers as “seasoned” counselors who become strategic partners with their clients.

The firm has been adding laterals from big firms, including the firm of Schall & Neuthe, a former partner at K&L Gates, who lauded Much Shelist’s “flexibility and teamwork.” Earlier this year, the firm also added five lawyers from Chicago bankruptcy boutique Neel Wolf & Associates.

Recent deals included representing the controlling shareholders in their sale of United Therapies Holdings LLC, a private-equity deal valued at $200 million. Firm lawyers represented Sun Capital Partners Inc. in its $35 million acquisition of Gem Shopping Network Inc. and Accel Entertainment Gaming LLC in its $25 million purchase of Illinois Gold Rush Inc.

The 25-lawyer real estate group was busy as well, completing leases for more than 1 million square feet of commercial space. Much Shelist itself in 2013 reconstituted its leases in its Chicago and Irvine, Calif., offices, saving hundreds of thousands of dollars.

One place where the firm doesn’t scrimp is compliance. Much Shelist has been recognized nationally by NLJ affiliate Corporate Counsel for managing conflicts and ethics issues.

—Joshua Greene

FIRM FACTS:
- Year founded: 1970
- Headquarters: Chicago
- Total attorneys: 88
- Partners: 57
- Associates: 10

Nossaman

With cash-strapped government agencies using public-private partnerships to fund rail, toll road and other infrastructure projects, Nossaman is riding high.

Last year, the firm devised a strategy to take full advantage of the opportunities. It grouped all lawyers into four departments: business transactions and public policy; infrastructure; litigation; and natural resources and real estate.

“We’re constantly looking for innovative ways to get these projects financed and constructed,” managing partner George Joseph said.

The departments enable the firm to efficiently manage lawyers, projects and efforts to get more work.

“It helps us make sure we’re getting the most out of cross-selling between our groups,” Joseph said.

Nossaman is lead outside counsel for the Indiana Finance Authority on a public-private partnership for the $1.2 billion East End Crossing toll bridge near Louisville, part of the $2.6 billion Ohio River Bridges project. Ice Miller of Indianapolis is local counsel.

The firm is also lead outside counsel on various Florida Department of Transportation projects, including a $1.6 billion improvement of 13 miles of Interstate Route 595 in Broward County. The department’s director of transportation development, Gerry O’Reilly, said Nossaman’s experience gained from previous projects was invaluable. “They’re knowledgeable about major projects, so they can usually bring a solution to issues that might arise from past experience as opposed to trial and error,” O’Reilly said.

In addition to Los Angeles, the firm has three other California offices plus outposts in Austin, Washington and Arlington, Va.

Besides offering alternative fee arrangements to woo clients, Nossaman uses contract lawyers for routine work and expects to see increases there, Joseph said.

—Sheri Qualters

FIRM FACTS:
- Year founded: 1942
- Largest office: Los Angeles
- Total attorneys: 142
- Partners: 99
- Associates: 40

Tarter Krinsky & Drogin

Tarter Krinsky & Drogin is a Big Apple firm with a midsize focus. Since its founding in 2001, the full-service New York-based firm of 57 lawyers has put most of its energy into middle-market companies rather than private-sector giants. Its client roster includes New York-based restaurant chain Bubby’s Pie Co. and Brooklyn developer Cayuga Capital Management LLC, for example.

“There was this big gap in the legal market,” managing partner Alan Tarter said of launching a firm dedicated primarily to midsize businesses.

In 2013, Tarter Krinsky was particularly busy helping its clients expand. For Cayuga, the firm helped purchase, lease and finance Playland Motel, a beach-themed hotel that opened in July near Rockaway Beach in Queens, N.Y. David Pfeffer, chairman of the firm’s construction practice, handled the matter.

For Bubby’s, the firm assisted with the October opening of the eatery’s location at the High Line, a park built on an old elevated railway on New York’s West Side. A team from Tarter Krinsky, led by partner Eric Zipkowitz, handled leasing and construction agreements, among other matters. The firm is advising the restaurant on licensing as it seeks to expand outside of the United States. “We really worked hand-in-hand with Bubby’s,” Tarter said.

The firm is committed to helping its employees advance in their careers. Tarter Krinsky requires that all of its workers come up with a professional or personal goal for the firm to support through financial assistance and coaching.

Tarter Krinsky provided one of its paralegals with financial support to become a certified fraud examiner, he said. The certification has allowed the paralegal to bring in new business for the firm, Tarter said.

“We are constantly working to improve ourselves,” he said.

—Andrew Ramonas

FIRM FACTS:
- Year founded: 2001
- Headquarters: New York
- Total attorneys: 57
- Partners: 29
- Associates: 15
Thompson, Coe, Cousins & Irons

Thompson, Coe, Cousins & Irons is right-sized to adjust rapidly to changing client needs. After a series of hurricanes, particularly in Texas, the Dallas-based firm expanded its catastrophe-related practice group, said Jack Cleaveland, chairman of the management committee.

"They have come to us because they get hundreds of lawsuits filed, and they’re time sensitive," Cleaveland said.

Other attorneys are drawn to that model. Last year, the firm brought aboard a group of eight California lawyers it knew from past casework. The Los Angeles office, known as Thompson Coe & O’Meara, now has 10 lawyers.

Over the years, the firm has developed discovery teams and national trial teams for major product manufacturers, said partner and management committee member Roger Higgins. The firm represents Fireman’s Fund Insurance Co. in catastrophe work, said litigation technical director Alan Freudenheim. The lion’s share of the firm’s work for the company is in Texas representing policyholders when third parties sue them, Freudenheim said. Fireman’s hires Thompson Coe, and its other firms, on an alternative fee basis, he said.

"The key for us is we do view it as a partnership, and I think the firm does as well," Freudenheim said.

It’s clear that firm leaders also value internal relationships. Thompson Coe boasts a partnership that’s 31 percent female, offers flexible schedules and a merit-based compensation system with bonuses for top performers.

Cleaveland said the Los Angeles expansion stemmed from an opportunity to bring in like-minded lawyers. Thompson Coe opened its Austin, Houston and St. Paul outposts under similar circumstances, Cleaveland said.

“We found the right people and chose to open an office there. That’s just been our history,” Cleaveland said.

—SHERRI QUARKERS

FIRM FACTS:
- Year founded: 1951
- Headquarters: Dallas
- Total attorneys: 150
- Partners: 87
- Associates: 57

"We found the right people and chose to open an office there [in Austin, Houston and St. Paul.] That’s just been our history." —JACK CLEAVELAND

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Wendel, Rosen, Black & Dean

Wendel, Rosen, Black & Dean is firmly planted in the middle of real estate and business deals in Oakland. But the 105-year-old firm has spread its roots with niche specialties that reflect the greater East Bay's culture and its future legal needs.

The firm represented the Port of Oakland in its redevelopment of the Brooklyn Basin, one of the region's biggest deals, which broke ground in March after more than a decade of work. Wendel Rosen partners Bruce Flusman, Mike Dean and Christine Noma worked on a $34 million slice of the $1.5 billion project that includes a key piece of funding from a Chinese company.

When it comes to the influx in foreign capital in the Oakland area, "Brooklyn Basin creates a pool of work for us we can take advantage of," partner R. Zachary Wasserman said. For example, funding might come from the Middle East for a sports arena project to keep professional sports franchises in town. The firm represents Oakland's planning team.

Managing partner Richard Waxman said Oakland's blossoming restaurant culture represents additional growth potential for the firm, as a one-stop shop for permitting, real estate leasing, land use and employment law. Wendell Rosen offers lower rates than in the San Francisco legal market, and allow attorneys to go to their clients' places of business and give one-on-one attention. Waxman said.

The firm also continues to develop its green business practices after itself becoming a leader in sustainable business practices. That includes partner Donald Simon's work to draft a 2012 law that allows corporations to emphasize the environment in their business decisions, instead of only profits.

The firm's leadership creates interest or at least fits in well with some of the ecologically minded companies in the state, such as Patagonia Inc. and craft breweries. Wasserman said. —TOM REEG

FIRM FACTS:
- Year founded: 1909
- Headquarters: Oakland
- Total attorneys: 58
- Partners: 52
- Associates: 6

Zuckerman Spader

From terrorism financing to pro football injuries to political scandals, lawyers at Zuckerman Spader are at the forefront of some of the most important legal battles of the day.

The 95-lawyer litigation boutique points to its lean structure and experienced lawyers as keys to its success. "We have more flexibility in terms of the kinds of cases we can take," chairman Graeme Bush said.

For example, firm lawyers and co-counsel are suing Credit Lyonnais S.A. and Arab Bank PLC for alleged involvement in funding Middle Eastern terrorism. Both cases survived motions for summary judgment and are pending.

Zuckerman lawyers are playing a prominent role in litigation against the National Football League over concussions, with partners Dwight Bostwick and Carl Kravitz representing a number of former NFL players in the consolidated suit. Also in the spotlight, the firm represents former Internal Revenue Service commissioner Lois Lerner, who faces inquiries over the alleged targeting of conservative organizations.

Bush described the firm's price structure as "less expensive ... because of the way we staff cases."

Zuckerman Spader doesn't hire lawyers straight out of law school, preferring to bring in laterals who have spent seven years at other firms or from clerkships. It has many more partners than associates and staff attorneys combined—which means fewer but more seasoned lawyers on each case.

In recent months, Zuckerman has expanded its areas of expertise. In October, lateral partner Jason Lilien, former head of the New York State Charities Bureau, launched a practice advising nonprofits on corporate governance and compliance. And in March, Jon Fetterolf, previously a partner at Williams & Connolly, brought his sports practice, representing professional baseball players, coaches and agents. —JENNA GIBBEN

FIRM FACTS:
- Year founded: 1975
- Headquarters: Washington
- Total attorneys: 95
- Partners: 52
- Associates: 20

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