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Homegrown Success

Greenberg Glusker attorneys say the firm has stayed true to Los Angeles for 65 years.

By Shane Nelson

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Norman H. Levine first joined Greenberg Glusker Fields Claman & Machtinger LLP in 1975, and the longtime real estate litigator has since witnessed a great deal of change in the Los Angeles legal landscape.

"The firms that were like us 30, 40, 50 years ago - most of them are long gone or absorbed," Levine said. "Or in some instances, they've opened lots of offices in lots of places. We haven't done that. We haven't seen any advantage to it."

Greenberg Glusker celebrated its 65th anniversary last month, and Levine noted the firm's 110 attorneys all work out of just one Century City office building.

"First of all, we like each other. We get along, and it's nice having everybody here," Levine said. "Number two, our client base is built around the city of Los Angeles."

Levine added that technology has evolved to a point where hopping on planes to meet with clients or opening other national offices isn't really as necessary. But he emphasized that much of the firm's success can be traced back to its longstanding and intimate understanding of Los Angeles.

"We know what kind of city this is," Levine said. "This is not like New York - a city of big public companies. This is a city of mid-sized companies - largely a city of entertainment industry and real estate industry. We have not tried to be what some of the national firms have tried to be here because they



Sally James and Norman Levine in Los Angeles on Friday, April 26 | Justin L. Stewart / Special to the Daily Journal

come to Los Angeles without a clear understanding of what our economy is."

Launched on April 10, 1959, in a converted Beverly Hills Safeway store on Wilshire Boulevard, Greenberg Glusker applied a great deal of its early focus to real estate, according to Levine, but he said the firm has since diversified its practice areas to include litigation, entertainment, estate planning, employment, intellectual property and bankruptcy as well as land use and environmental law.

Levine noted that Greenberg Glusker's founding partners really constructed a firm culture where that brand of expansion was encouraged.

"When I joined the firm, we were dominated by four exceptional senior partners, and I'm sure people around town thought the firm would last only as long as they did," said Levine, who served as Greenberg Glusker's managing partner from 1998 to 2011.

"But we're probably stronger than we ever were in terms of the breadth of the practice, in terms of the books of business of a large number of our lawyers and in terms of our reputation," Levine continued, adding that 96-year-old partner emeritus Arthur N. Greenberg is still in the Century City office most days.

Partner emeritus Sidney J. Machtinger, meanwhile, squeezed in some

time for a 102nd birthday party with folks at the firm last month.

"We wanted to have a celebration, so we called him and said, 'Sid, can you come in on Tuesday? We'll have some cake,' and he said, 'No, I'm going to be in San Francisco,'" Levine recalled with a chuckle. "I hope you and I are still going back and forth to San Francisco on our 102nd."

Partner Sally C. James was introduced to Greenberg Glusker as a summer associate in 2007 while she was still a UCLA Law school student but didn't join the firm as a practicing attorney until 2017. James said she sees Greenberg "almost on a daily basis."

“To see Arthur Greenberg come in and work, it’s an amazing feeling - especially because I was at UCLA, and I remember Arthur Greenberg’s name being all over the school,” James said. “Our lounge was called the Arthur Greenberg Lounge. ... I think it gives the more junior attorneys inspiration to see a legend walking around who’s accessible to them.”

An entertainment and corporate transactional attorney, James said she represents clients like Chris Hemsworth and Silent House Productions - the entity behind the 30th Annual SAG Awards and sev-

eral big names at Coachella this year. Not shy about her sincere appreciation for Greenberg Glusker, James said the firm’s culture is a terrific strong suit.

“We really care about people - both colleagues and clients,” said James, who is a member of the firm’s recruiting committee. “The type of lawyers we’re attracting - it’s people that really, really care. ... And yes, we are motivated by financials, but I think we’re also motivated by creating attorneys that are going to be here longterm and have happy and successful lives - both on the job and outside, whether that’s with

families or other interests.”

Levine was quick to agree.

“We try to allow people to live a full life,” he said. “We work hard. I don’t want to suggest we don’t. I was up early this morning, and I will keep going into the evening, but I’ve always had time to raise my kids and to be with my grandkids and to be involved in nonprofits and to live a complete life. I’m not sure that’s true everywhere.”

Levine did say, however, that the firm’s makeup has changed substantially over the years.

“We started as a Jewish law firm. When I was growing up in the

1950s and ‘60s, I thought there were two kinds of law firms - ones that accepted Jews and ones that didn’t,” Levine explained. “By the time I got here in 1975, the firm was no longer all Jewish. ... We were all white, and we were mostly male, but we were not all Jewish.”

“We certainly have people here of various diverse backgrounds,” Levine said. “Are we doing a perfect job of that? No. Would we like to be more diverse than we are? Yes, and it’s not always easy. ... But it’s something we work on and care about.”

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