

Office Snapshot: Baker McKenzie's Growing LA Outpost

By James Mills

Law360 (June 24, 2022, 3:59 PM EDT) -- Dating back to 1949, Baker McKenzie boasts nearly 80 offices worldwide, and although its location in Los Angeles is just four years old, it's already proving to be one of the firm's most important.

According to Darcy Down, a corporate attorney who transferred into the LA office in 2020 after eight years at the firm's Chicago office, many of the other Baker McKenzie offices are staying busy thanks to work and relationships coming out of the LA office.

"I feel like [the LA office has] very quickly become part of the Baker fabric," Down told Law360 Pulse. "Our tech mergers and acquisitions practice up in San Francisco and Palo Alto benefit greatly from some of the relationships that are built out of the LA office. Other practices as well. Baker has a pretty intense and large network [of services it provides to clients]. It takes a lot to actually put a dent in it, and I think the LA office has ... made a name for itself pretty quickly among that Baker network."

The firm has had a presence in California since 1970 when it launched an office in San Francisco, and first ventured into Los Angeles in 1988 via a merger with the LA-based Macdonald Halsted & Laybourne. The foray ultimately proved unsuccessful, however, and the location closed in 1993 after just five years.

Some 25 years later, the firm tried again.

According to Michael Brewer, who serves as managing partner for Baker McKenzie's California offices, having a presence in LA allowed the firm to expand its client offerings throughout the state.

"The firm sought an opportunity to expand our California presence to really build on the strong footprint that we already had in the Bay Area, and LA is a key market, especially for litigation," Brewer said. "Even before the LA office was open, we were working in LA but didn't have a physical presence there."

The new LA office started small when it opened in March 2018 – just four attorneys based out of a WeWork space in El Segundo, a beach city adjacent to Los Angeles International Airport. Within a year, the firm had grown to over a dozen attorneys and rented space in a Century City office tower.

Down said the Los Angeles office had a scrappy, start-up feel to it, a vast contrast to the firm's largest office in Chicago where she previously worked.

"It was a different energy and a really exciting energy," Down said. "It really did feel like a start-up. If you

wanted to do something, it was very exciting because you could do it, but you had to do it yourself. There wasn't a lot of support. There wasn't a lot of help, it was an all-hands-on-deck situation. It was cool to see it."

Even though the office now numbers 50 attorneys and business professionals, Down said the energy levels are still high and still exciting.

"There's a big desire to continue hiring and continue growing, to continue to be a success," she said. "Nobody is sitting on their hands now and saying, 'Oh, we've done it, we're already here. Let someone else deal with it now.' Everybody is still paving the way for some greater things."

THE LEADER

In July 2019, Baker McKenzie hired securities litigation attorney Perrie Weiner, the former head of DLA Piper's outpost in the city, to take the helm of the Los Angeles office and help it grow.

"When [Baker McKenzie's North America chief executive officer] Colin Murray met with me [when I was hired], he said 'the LA office will be your legacy,'" Weiner told Law360 Pulse. "I try to live up to that."

Weiner's colleagues think he's succeeding.

"Perrie is the kind of guy who steps into any situation and just gets things done," Down said. "He was a great addition to the office to take it to that next level."

California managing partner Brewer described Weiner as having "boundless energy."

His colleagues said that Weiner had also brought in a significant volume of business thanks to the many contacts he has developed over the years.

"Perrie has become a legend throughout the firm for his 'Never-Ending Rolodex,' as people call it," Down said.

Weiner tries to make things fun. Consequently, he also serves as a social director, coming up with activities such as the recent rooftop soiree for summer associates held at the nearby Waldorf Astoria. He also plans to have a party at his house in Beverly Hills and a beach gathering as well.

Weiner is also the drummer in the office band, Run BMC, which performs in charitable battle-of-bands events against other BigLaw office groups. The most recent battle, held in late April at the Whisky a Go Go on the Sunset Strip, netted more than \$225,000 for Law Rocks, a charitable organization that offers music opportunities for underprivileged kids.

"I try to come up with fun things to do that are a little bit different, that not every firm does. It gives people a way to collaborate," said Weiner. "There's nothing like getting into a sound studio on a weekend with people outside the law environment and just playing music together."

Weiner asks attorneys and staff in the LA office to come into the office three days a week. He tries to make it fun by bringing in breakfast on Tuesday and lunches on Wednesday, and takes smaller groups



out to lunch other days of the week.

"We're encouraging people to come back three days a week," Weiner said. "That's what we think is balanced and reasonable. People are doing it, they're wanting to do that, which caused us to have to expand again on the 18th floor."

THE LOCATION

The Baker McKenzie office is located in Century City at 10250 Constellation Blvd., in the 35-story Constellation Place office building, directly across the street from the Nordstrom department store in the upscale Westfield Century City shopping plaza. The office moved there from an office tower a block away in June 2021, initially taking up 75% of the 18th floor. However, the office is now expanding to take over the entire 18th floor.

THE TEAM

Total headcount in LA: 50

12 Partners

1 Of Counsel

21 Associates

16 Business Professionals/Other Timekeepers

THE WORK

Weiner reported that the office's securities litigation practice, which he was tasked with building up when he joined the firm, was one of its strongest.

Brewer added that the LA office has strong commercial litigation, employment, mergers and acquisitions, tax, privacy and cybersecurity practices.

Among the office's clients are AEG Worldwide, a leader in sports and live entertainment and the world's largest owner of sports teams and sports events. Baker McKenzie attorneys advised AEG on employment issues arising out of the coronavirus pandemic, including health and safety measures, return to work policies and reopening considerations.

The office also advised Spectrum Brands Inc. as international counsel on the global carve-out and sale of its home and hardware improvement business to Assa Abloy.

COMINGS AND GOINGS

In April, commercial litigator Nancy Nguyen Sims joined from DLA Piper.

--Editing by Alex Hubbard.