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MIDSIZE

HOT LIST

A SPECIAL REPORT

The National Law Journal here spotlights 20 law firms that in no way are stuck in the shadows cast by giant competitors. As clients demand better value for their legal spend and potential laterals more satisfaction from their careers, these firms know they're in a good spot. They also know that it takes keen business strategy to capitalize on that position. The firms we've selected for our Midsize Hot List are led by forward-thinking attorneys who are guiding their organizations in new practice directions, amassing more business in mainstay practices and spreading into new regions. They all have one thing in common: They're midsize, and they like it. —LEIGH JONES

Zuckerman Spaeder LLP

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Zuckerman Spaeder LLP

Top-notch firm for high-profile defense work.



Up against much larger firms, 90-attorney Zuckerman Spaeder is known nationwide for defending high-profile clients and landing key lateral hires.

Already a fixture in Washington for 35 years, Zuckerman Spaeder LLP expanded its New York office in 2011 with top criminal defense lawyers. Firmwide, offices in New York; Washington; Tampa, Fla.; and Baltimore focus on four practices: civil litigation, business counseling, white-collar criminal defense and investigations.

Chairman Graeme Bush credited “lean, efficient, partner-driven representation” as the growth engine—with a special emphasis on lean. Zuckerman Spaeder LLP relies on “opportunistic” hiring, he said. As Bush put it, “We’ve been able to handle our expansion with no debt and no negative impact on our operations.”

In the 13-attorney New York office, Evan Stewart is the “anchor,” Bush said. That’s a big job, considering the talent he bumps into in the hallways, including Steven Cohen, former aide to Governor Andrew Cuomo; former federal judge Barbara Jones; Paul Shechtman, former director of criminal justice under former Governor George Pataki; Andrew Tomback, a U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission and regulatory litigation specialist who defended former American International Group Inc. chief executive Maurice “Hank” Greenberg; and Mitra Hormozi, former head of the New York State Commission on Public Integrity and of the organized crime unit in the U.S. attorney’s office in Brooklyn, N.Y.

The firm garnered two big victories last year when it won acquittals for two New York-area construction companies in a criminal case involving a deadly 2008 crane collapse. It worked out a confidential settlement in the civil case



GRAEME W. BUSH

related to the high-profile sexual assault charges against client former International Monetary Fund chief Dominique Strauss-Kahn.

Zuckerman Spaeder doesn’t “overpay [partners] for business generation,” Bush said, but there seems to be plenty of it. The firm won a motion for summary judgment in October on behalf of former Fannie Mae chief financial officer J. Timothy Howard in a lawsuit filed by investors in the wake of Fannie Mae’s 2004 restatement of financial results.

Perhaps best known, of late, was the Strauss-Kahn case. The firm’s work “built respect on our end,” said opposing counsel Douglas Wigdor of Thompson Wigdor. “They came out with novel arguments, and my takeaway was that they were certainly doing a good job for their clients.”

—LISA HORTON

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