

NJ Powerhouse: Riker Danzig Scherer Hyland & Perretti

By Emma Cueto

Law360, New York (October 5, 2017, 2:50 PM EDT) -- In the past year, Riker Danzig Scherer Hyland & Perretti LLP has racked up a list of accomplishments that include winning a precedential Third Circuit decision in a proposed class action, securing a \$10 million settlement for a construction client, and representing a real estate company in the largest New Jersey office lease transaction in 2016.

More than 130 years after it was founded, the firm has stayed true to its New Jersey roots, with all but nine of its 133 attorneys based in the state. According to managing partner Glenn Clark, that strong New Jersey focus has helped the firm stay dominant, leading to its spot on our 2017 list of New Jersey Powerhouses.

“It’s a very old firm, so it’s well-established [in New Jersey],” Clark said. “We now have a significant New York practice as well, but our bread and butter is New Jersey-based.”



Riker Danzig’s history in New Jersey goes back at least as far as 1882, to the firm Riker & Riker, but the available documents suggest that it was actually established prior to that year, Clark said. The firm merged with Emerson Emery & Danzig after World War II and then updated its name several times throughout the 20th century until taking its current form in 1985.

It strives to be a cordial place to work, according to Clark.

“It’s an open door kind of environment where people just walk into each other’s office, chat, ask questions, bounce ideas off one another. Everyone’s on a first-name basis,” Clark said. “Partners and associates go to lunch together.”

The firm has been behind several important New Jersey cases in the past year, including a precedential decision in the Third Circuit in *Chassen v. Fidelity National Financial Inc.*, a proposed class action brought by homeowners who claimed fidelity overcharged them in mortgage fees. Riker Danzig successfully convinced the appellate court that Fidelity had not forfeited its right to pursue arbitration by not pushing for arbitration before the Supreme Court’s 2011 decision in *AT&T v. Concepcion*, which strengthened the Federal Arbitration Act.

Clark cited litigation as one of the firm’s strongest qualities.

“If it’s significant litigation in New Jersey, chances are we’ll be involved,” he said.

The firm is currently litigating a \$100 million case for Virgin Media in New Jersey state court and representing longtime client Johnson & Johnson in multicounty litigation in the state. It also secured a \$10 million settlement for construction contractor Spectraserv from the Middlesex County Utilities Authority in 2016 after the company alleged that the MCUA favored political contributors when awarding contracts.

And when litigating appellate cases such as *Chassen v. Fidelity*, Riker Danzig also has an important advantage: a strong lineup of former officials with an of counsel relationship to the firm, Clark said.

“We’re able to attract people coming off the bench, very high-profile people,” Clark said. “They would be consulted and very much involved in those cases, preparing the lawyers for oral arguments.”

The roster of public servants at the firm includes former New Jersey Supreme Court Justice Stewart G. Pollock, who is currently of counsel. Others who have been associated with Riker Danzig include ex-Congressman William J. Hughes and the late Nicholas Katzenbach, who served as U.S. attorney general under President Lyndon Johnson.

In addition to recruiting former officials, the firm has also served as a launch pad for a number of high-profile posts.

The first female justice on New Jersey’s Supreme Court, Marie Garibaldi, was a Riker Danzig partner when she was appointed in 1982. The state’s first black attorney general, Peter Harvey, who was confirmed in 2003, was a partner at Riker Danzig before going into the public sector. And numerous other Riker Danzig partners have gone on to careers on the bench, the Department of Justice, the governor’s office, and other positions.

“It’s part of the history of the firm,” Clark said. “The firm always had this idea of giving back. When I started as a summer associate, one of the first things I was told by a partner who became a presiding judge with the U.S. district court was: ‘Be good to the profession, it’ll be good to you. Give back. It’s part of your obligation as a lawyer.’”

That same history, he said, also drives the firm’s strong pro bono work. All lawyers are encouraged to do pro bono work or to volunteer, and most do, according to Clark. Clark, whose practice focuses on health care, among other areas, sits on several hospital boards of trustees and does other pro bono work relating to health care.

Other Riker Danzig attorneys provide pro bono services for a wide variety of New Jersey community organizations, including the New Jersey Performing Arts Center, Jersey Battered Women’s Service, Housing Partnership for Morris County, and national groups such as the American Heart Association, according to the firm’s website.

“I always tell people, ‘What do you like? Find a charitable component to that,’” Clark said. “It can be anything — a golf club if you’re into golf, or your school, or anything. Get involved.”

In addition to its pro bono focus and its litigation expertise, the firm also prides itself on its real estate experience and its ability to handle major business transactions. It recently represented Blue Apron as

the company secured a lease for 495,000 square feet of office space in the revamped General Motorsplant in Linden, New Jersey, and it helped Lincoln Equities Group pull off the state's largest office lease transaction in 2016, securing a space for a corporate headquarters in Giralda Farms.

Riker also represented Rockefeller Group in acquiring 1.6 million square feet of warehouse space, a type of transaction that is becoming more common for the firm as more and more companies look for regional warehouses to help "compete with the Amazons of the world," Clark said.

The state's legal landscape has changed a great deal in the past few decades, but the firm's community roots and New Jersey focus have helped Riker Danzig thrive. While many out-of-state firms that moved in during the 1980s have been leaving or closing offices, Riker Danzig has stayed the course, Clark said.

Financially, the firm is on track, he said, at a time when many firms are facing financial struggles. He attributed the financial success to keeping a careful eye on costs, including the decision to only hire as needed.

But where some firms have downsized their operation, Riker Danzig has expanded its practice areas and come up with more "creative" fee arrangements — steps that make the firm more attractive to clients, according to Clark.

"Law in New Jersey has become a saturated, mature market. There's tremendous competition," Clark said. "But what we do is we have a model that is focused on New Jersey. And by doing that, I think it's given us staying power."

--Editing by Jeremy Barker.