

New Jersey Powerhouse: Riker Danzig

By **Vin Gurrieri**

Law360, New York (June 19, 2015, 4:59 PM ET) -- Although Riker Danzig Scherer Hyland & Perretti LLP's roots in New Jersey date back to at least 1882 — managing partner Glenn Clark says the firm tried to go back further, but it couldn't dig up reliable records before that time — the firm has never wavered from its commitment to being one of the pre-eminent firms in the Garden State, handling numerous multimillion-dollar cases and key transactions for its clients.

All but five of the firm's 136 attorneys work out of the firm's main office in Morristown and satellite office in Trenton. Although the firm sustains a New York City presence with a five-attorney Midtown location, Riker Danzig has stayed true to its Jersey roots by maintaining its generations-long focus on the state it has always called home, in part by representing multinational corporations like Johnson & Johnson that operate in the state, making it one of Law360's powerhouse firms for New Jersey.



Glenn Clark

"One thing I don't think people appreciate enough is how old we are," Clark said. "We actually commissioned someone to trace the history of the firm. [It traces] to 1882, at least. That was the oldest directory we could find."

That history harks back to original name partner Adrian Riker, who practiced at Riker & Riker in Newark in the late 19th century. Shortly after World War II the firm merged with Emerson Emery & Danzig, and later name changes reflected the tenures of former New Jersey Attorneys General William Hyland and Peter Perretti, according to the firm's website.

Throughout its existence, the firm has incorporated such high-profile public servants into its operations, something Clark says is part of the firm's rich history.

Peter C. Harvey, who became the first black New Jersey attorney general when he was confirmed in 2003, had practiced at Riker Danzig.

Marie Garibaldi, the first woman appointed to the New Jersey Supreme Court, was also a partner at the firm before assuming her judicial role in 1982. Garibaldi, who served on the state's high court for nearly two decades before retiring in 2000, was also the first woman to be president of the New Jersey State Bar Association.

Another longtime Riker Danzig partner, Anne M. Patterson, was appointed to the state high court by Gov. Chris Christie in late 2011.

The firm, though, is not only a location for lawyers that move on to the state's highest court. It is also a destination for justices who have retired from the bench.

Stewart G. Pollock, who spent about two decades on the New Jersey Supreme Court, joined the firm after retiring from the bench in 1999. A member of the legal world for more than 50 years, Pollock still maintains an active practice of counsel in the firm's litigation, appellate strategies and alternative dispute resolution practices.

Another current attorney, Zahid N. Quraishi, joined the firm after five years as an assistant U.S. attorney in the District of New Jersey.

The firm's proud history never strays far from the minds of the firm's leaders, who say they constantly strive to live up to its vaunted reputation within the state in their day-to-day dealings.

"There is a sense of stewardship ... and a sense of responsibility to maintain that reputation," Clark said. "We can go to a courthouse and people know who we are. It gives us credibility."

Partners Kelly Crawford and Brian O'Donnell, each members of the firm's executive committee, echoed that sentiment.

Crawford, in particular, pointed out that the firm's development through the years has largely been based not on advertising or its website but instead on the back of its reputation — the importance of which is imparted to younger lawyers.

"I'm proud of that heritage, it carries a lot of weight," she said. "I feel very strongly about young lawyers being brought up to respect that reputation. I always talk to my [people] about doing top-notch, stellar work because [it] not only reflects on clients but reflects on the firm as well."

O'Donnell added, "The Riker name is golden, if not iconic. Judges know the history of the firm and the quality of the people we hire."

Riker's reputation within the state has allowed it to tackle numerous high-profile matters within its key practices, which include insurance, banking, pharmaceuticals and real estate. In particular, the pharmaceutical sector, which has a strong presence in New Jersey, is a key area in which Riker Danzig serves its clients and involved one of its most high-profile recent litigations.

The firm was Johnson & Johnson's trial counsel in thousands of individual suits in state and federal mass tort litigation over injuries allegedly caused by transvaginal mesh implants.

Riker Danzig also acted as appellate counsel for Paterson-based St. Joseph's Regional Medical Center's CEO William A. McDonald and its OB/GYN department chair Roger Kierce after a state jury awarded \$1.3 million to doctors who brought various contract claims against the hospital and the individual administrators.

In a published ruling last year, the appellate court reversed the jury's verdict and dismissed all claims against McDonald and Kierce, as well as a breach of contract claim against the hospital. The New Jersey

Supreme Court upheld the appellate court's decision in March.

In another recent case, the firm represented hardwood flooring distributor Lumber Liquidators Inc. in a class action alleging it violated New Jersey's Consumer Fraud Act and the Truth-in-Consumer Contract, Warranty and Notice Act, TCCWNA for short.

The case involved an issue of first impression concerning whether the application furniture delivery regulations could be applied to Lumber Liquidators, a distributor of a construction material.

In February, Riker Danzig convinced the trial court to dismiss the case after arguing in part that flooring is not a "home furnishing" whose delivery is subject to regulation under the two statutes. The case is now on appeal.

Riker Danzig also was part of the litigation team that represented Standard & Poor's Financial Services LLC and its parent company McGraw Hill Financial Inc. in an action brought by the state alleging the company shaped its analysis of structured finance securities around its own revenue goals rather than unbiased data.

The case, which was related to a larger action brought by attorneys general from 19 states and Washington, D.C., and the U.S. Department of Justice, was ultimately resolved as part of a nearly \$1.4 billion global settlement.

Aside from litigation, the firm has also represented the Rockefeller Group since 2000 in its acquisition, remediation and redevelopment of a former Exxon Mobile Corp. site in Florham Park that spans more than 300 acres, one of the largest pieces of vacant property in Morris County.

The firm in December 2014 helped Rockefeller complete the sale of the largest remaining parcel, 70 acres, to a residential homebuilder with plans to construct more than 400 age-restricted housing units.

The firm's real estate chops also extend beyond the Garden State's borders, as it has helped media giant BuzzFeed Inc. expand its real estate holdings in recent years in New York City and Los Angeles.

In building upon its approximately 130-year legacy, the firm's leaders say they hope to continue in its commitment to the state it has called home since its inception.

As Crawford and O'Donnell each stated, the firm is only as good as the next generation of attorneys and firm leaders who are willing to uphold that commitment.

"We look for people who are quality attorneys with quality skills," Crawford said. "If we invest the time in them, we want them to be here for a long time. Having an interest in being in New Jersey is important."

Such an interest is what drew Crawford, a New Jersey native, to the firm in the first place more than 20 years ago.

"When I graduated from law school it was the one place I wanted to work," she said, "because it was in New Jersey."

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