

How Greenberg Traurig Became A 'Truly Texas' Firm

By Lynn LaRowe

Law360 (December 14, 2023, 3:55 PM EST) -- When Greenberg Traurig LLP launched in Dallas with 16 attorneys two decades ago, the firm was listening to its clients and following the trends of where business was headed.

Greenberg Traurig has since grown to more than 160 lawyers across three offices in the Lone Star State — an expansion that's par for the course for the firm, which was founded in Miami 50 years ago and has since spread its reach around the world without mergers or "buying the market" by putting existing partners in a new location.

Instead, the firm has implemented a strategy of hometown recruitment, diversity in hiring and community involvement that has made it a mainstay in Texas and elsewhere, firm chair Richard Rosenbaum said.

"We wanted to be the first firm that would end up feeling truly Texas, but that would have a global platform," he said.

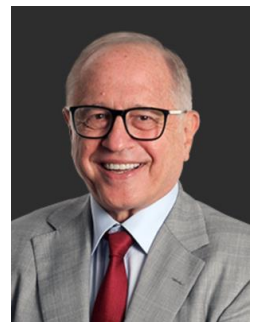
By hiring lawyers with a track record in the state and encouraging long-term community involvement, the firm has been able to establish itself as a Texas firm, added Dallas managing partner Joe Coniglio.

"There are no shortcuts when it comes to really creating an authentic connection and being part of the legal, business, charitable and community landscape," Coniglio said. "We're right next to our clients at community events and doing all the things that create real relationships for the law firm."

Law360 Pulse sat down with Rosenbaum and Coniglio to talk about the firm's growth in Texas and the philosophy behind its overall success. This interview has been edited for length and clarity.

How did the firm identify Texas as a place to be?

Rosenbaum: A little longer than 20 years ago, we started looking into Texas because of one basic habit, or style, of our business. We don't see where everybody else is going and try to get there too — we are more about looking out three to five years. We look at where business and wealth is going. That's a key strategy. If you look at things like where U-Haul trucking rented most inbound vehicles, they were always going to Texas and Florida. We saw the trends and we listened to our clients.



Richard Rosenbaum



Joe Coniglio

We are in Dallas and Houston because of the businesses that were growing there, and those markets have exceeded our expectations. Austin made sense for all kinds of reasons. We have one of the leading music practices in the country, there's technology, and also politics and government.

We wanted to be a firm that could have somebody in Houston, Dallas or Austin ask if we have any offices outside Texas. We wanted to be the first firm that would end up feeling truly Texas but that would have a global platform. When we got here, there mostly were no big firms with a real commitment to Texas — they may have had offices here, but not a real commitment to the state.

How does the firm show its commitment to the state, and why is that important?

Coniglio: We like to say we have Texas roots and a global reach. We approach all the markets that we're in that way. For example, 20 years ago when we came into Texas, it wasn't just to service clients that might have a need in Texas, but more about growing into the Texas community and knowing the unique and enterprising spirit of the state and becoming part of the fabric of the legal and business communities. There are no shortcuts when it comes to really creating an authentic connection and being part of the legal, business, charitable and community landscape. We're right next to our clients at community events and doing all the things that create real relationships for the law firm.

We are one of the leading firms when it comes to giving across the country, and Texas is no different. In Dallas, for example, we have a significant relationship with Bonton Farms in the South Dallas community providing pro bono services and actually going and working on the farm. [Bonton Farms is an urban garden that operates in an area once known as a food desert.] The farms have transformed that community that was challenged in so many ways.

We also operate as one unified firm. We call ourselves GT Texas — we don't think in terms of individual offices, and the Dallas, Houston and Austin offices work seamlessly together. You hear about big firms that have offices that don't communicate and work separately; we're the antithesis of that. It's Greenberg Traurig Texas, but there are also people picking up the phone on the first ring to help you in our offices around the country. Candidly, I think that's why we've had so many talented lawyers join in Texas over the years. We sort of did it the hard way by not merging with other firms, but we've been able to cherry-pick people who are not only great lawyers but who actually fit our culture and grow great teams. It took some discipline, but for us it's never been about building but being built to last.

Rosenbaum: When I joined the firm 38 years ago, I was the 90th lawyer and we were only in South Florida. Now, we're almost 2,700 lawyers all over the world. We are one unified firm, and that is very important to us. It meant that if we were going to build in Texas, it was going to be a somewhat lengthy process. We had to pick lawyers that fit with Greenberg Traurig's culture and values and were already known and established in Texas so we could [grow in the state] but that fit as part of our overall operation. Let's face it, your brand is created by the people on the ground locally.

Why is diversity among the ranks so important to Greenberg Traurig?

Rosenbaum: When you look at who we have in Texas, I don't think there's a more diverse firm. We have people of color, people from the LGBTQ community, we have a number of leading Hispanic lawyers and a number of leading Black lawyers who are leaders at our firm in Texas. I don't think there's a Texas firm with a more diverse partnership.

Coniglio: At Greenberg Traurig, diversity is in our DNA, woven into the fabric of who the firm is. We were a small law firm founded by three Jewish lawyers over 54 years ago in Miami who faced discrimination. In many ways, we were not invited to the party, so we decided to build a firm where everyone was welcome. That three-person law office is now a law firm of 2,600 lawyers and 47 offices worldwide. We were led for many of those years by our then-CEO and now-Senior Chairman Cesar Alvarez, himself a Cuban immigrant who was the first Hispanic head of a major law firm.

For us, diversity is not a tagline — it is about valuing and respecting each other, and being in it together. It is about a constant focus on being the place to realize dreams and opportunities for people of all ages, no matter the background, color, gender, where they were born or who they love. With our history and our culture, and our committed and consistent actions, in many ways we have not just made diversity into the fabric of our business; rather, it is the fabric of who we are.

Will the firm continue its growth in Texas?

Rosenbaum: We're not yet where we want to be in Texas, but we've made huge progress. When people join our firm, they don't often go, and there's a lot of movement in Texas, lawyers going from firm to firm. We didn't want that. I understood from the earliest days that if you want to be in Texas you have to respect the people on the ground and empower them.

Coniglio: I joined the firm 15 years ago, and I am thankful for the leadership that was strategic in finding Texas a unique opportunity for us to grow, which we've done in a number of markets. We really feel like we have the wind behind our back now, and we will continue to grow through the next chapter and continue to build on that success.

The many corporations coming to town from across the globe are looking for law firms that are able to be agile and nimble to serve their needs in Texas, and also their international needs that may arise in connection with their growing company. We're excited about the next 20 years.

--Editing by Alanna Weissman.