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Real Relationships Matter for Long Island Law Firm

By Katie Gardener

Certilman Balin's Howard Stein has a credo for success that echoes the mantra of real estate experts. Instead of "location, location, location," the partner-in-charge of the real estate department of this preeminent law firm says it's all about "relationships, relationships, relationships."

That was underscored recently as the partners at Certilman Balin had their own real estate location dilemma. Should they renew their lease at 90 Merrick Ave. in East Meadow and keep their Nassau County presence? Or, should they move and consolidate their Nassau and Suffolk county offices? Relationships gave them the answer.

Certilman Balin renewed its lease for 15 years with its client, CLK

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—Bernard Hyman, managing partner

Properties. The firm's East Meadow office was redesigned, rebuilt, and updated with the latest technologies. Craig Koenigsberg, president and CEO of CLK, described 90 Merrick as "a trophy building with all the amenities that make it a Class-A property." He continued, "We are thrilled that we have this 15-year extension with our friends at Certilman Balin, and it was a truly exciting transaction for both of us."

Certilman Balin's Suffolk office is located at 1393 Veterans Memorial Highway, close to the Hauppauge Industrial Park and also to the Town of Brookhaven, where the name David Sloane is practically synonymous with land use and zoning work. In that office, a team of lawyers are well-versed in real estate, litigation, trust and estates, and environmental law. "The multi-faceted environmental practice assists clients with redevelopment of contaminated properties, compliance with environmental laws, and litigation issues involving contaminated properties and the State Environmental Quality Review Act (SEQRA)," says Environmental Law Partner Barry Cohen.

What Certilman Balin also offers its clients is old-fashioned, brick-and-mortar networking. In this age of Facebook and other electronic means of socializing, the law firm holds

steadfast to the idea of face-to-face meetings like breaking bread, enjoying a concert, or having a great game of golf with its clients.

A well-known benefit of signing on as a client with Certilman Balin is an invitation to the firm's annual golf outing, held every September at the Seawane Country Club in Hewlett Harbor. The guest list reads like a "Who's Who" of Long Island real estate leaders, and it overflows enough to require a second course for golf. This is where some of the region's biggest real estate deals often begin.

One of the most noteworthy deals was the negotiation of the sale of the Pumpkin Farm property in Melville to Canon USA, where Certilman Balin represented the Holiday Organization in a very complicated transaction that helped keep Canon's U.S.A. headquarters—and 2,000 jobs—on Long Island.

A Firm With a View

"It's hard to look at Long Island and not realize the influence that this law firm has had on the island's development and diversification," said the firm's Managing Partner Bernard Hyman. He credits the firm's success to high-quality legal work, dedication, and responsive client service for more than four decades. "The firm expanded from its beginnings as a Wall Street practice concentrating in public offerings and mergers and acquisitions, to its current position as Long Island's second largest full-service law firm with more than 80 attorneys practicing in 13 different areas of the law," he said. He and his brother, Allan, co-chair the firm's Tax Certiorari and Condemnation Practice Group, which has saved a substantial amount of taxes for its commercial, industrial, and residential clients.

The Commercial Lending practice, despite the economic downturn, continues to flourish. Michael O'Shea, who heads the group, along with other partners including Brendan DeRiggi and David Herold, focuses primarily on the representation of financial institutions and business entities in general corporate and real



The partners at Certilman Balin gather on the firm's central staircase.

estate areas. "We represent approximately 20 national, regional, and local lenders," said O'Shea.

Among their noteworthy transactions was the representation of the lenders in connection with the refinancing of the Flatiron Building in downtown Manhattan.

In addition, the Cooperative and Condominium Practice, co-chaired by Ira Adler and Richard Herzbach, continues to be one of the most active anywhere. "We represent local and national developers, and many of the offerings on condominiums and homeowner associations on Long Island and throughout New York state were filed by this department," said Herzbach.

An overview of the firm's diversification would not be complete without mention of the practice in which the firm has its roots, the Corporate Practice, led by Brian K. Ziegler. In addition to offering a full range of business and securities law services to

privately held businesses, real estate limited companies, and publicly traded corporations, the firm also structures many real estate joint ventures and private placements. Some years ago, when Prudential Long Island Realty wanted to expand to Manhattan and purchase the real estate brokerage

and property management businesses of Insignia Douglas Elliman and Insignia Residential Group, it turned to Brian Ziegler and his team to structure and close the \$71.5-million dollar acquisition. Today, the firm remains as outside counsel for Prudential Douglas Elliman.



A 9th floor conference room in East Meadow.

PHOTOS BY BOB GIGLIONE

PHOTO COURTESY CERTILMAN BALIN



Walnut Elementary School students with their teachers and Lawyers Involved in Kids' Education, or LIKE, mentors.

Painting a Brighter Future

Throughout the years, the firm has lifted itself up with one hand and, with its other hand, has lifted many others. The attorneys are actively committed to improving various aspects of Long Island life. It's in the area of mentoring that the firm is special.

Allan Hyman has coached the mock trial team at East Meadow's Clarke High School, and over the years they have won county and state championships. In conjunction with the Mentoring Partnership of Long Island, 15 of the firm's lawyers and staff meet at lunch time to mentor fourth and fifth graders at Walnut Elementary School, as part of the Lawyers

Involved in Kids' Education, or LIKE, program. In addition, the firm hosts a "Shadow Day" every Groundhog Day, taking teens who are interested in becoming attorneys to court for some real world experience.

Howard Stein teaches at the Touro College Jacob D. Fuchsberg Law Center, where he is chairman of the school's board of governors. Richard Herzbach and Allan Hyman teach at Hofstra University School of Law, where the firm, five years ago, instituted the Certilman Balin Honors Scholarship, given to a bright and deserving second-year law student.

Certilman Balin has helped many charities over the years. Many of the

firm's attorneys serve on the boards of not-for-profit organizations and have been honored by the American Cancer Society, the American Heart Association, Big Brothers/Big Sisters, the YMCA of Long Island, and the Tilles Center, to name a few.

It's About Appreciation

Over the years, Certilman Balin has been recognized with an array of awards. In 2009, it was inducted into the Long Island Builders Institute Hall of Fame. In 2008, Long Island magazine selected Certilman Balin as its M.V.P. in Professional Services, in recognition of the firm's growth, employee programs, and community involvement. That same year, Certilman Balin was named "Best Law Firm on Long Island" by the readership of Long Island Business News and also won for six other categories. Touro College Jacob D. Fuchsberg Law Center and its Externship Program presented Certilman Balin with the 2008-09 Outstanding Employer Award, and the Long Island Works Coalition named Certilman Balin one of 33 finalists for special awards. In addition, some of Long Island Business News' Top 50 Most Influential Business Women and 40 Under 40 Rising Stars are with the firm.

In referring to the firm's new ad campaign, Bernard Hyman agreed that there is an art to the practice of law. "At the heart of it all is the firm's loyal clients and staff," said Hyman. "We wouldn't be here without them." ❖



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The 90 Merrick Ave. reception area.