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FEATURE:
The Law Office of Sam J. Saad III
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The Law Office of Sam J. Saad III

Big Services, Small Fees Attract Loyal and Growing Commercial Client Base

By Elizabeth W. Pearce

He's an attorney by trade and a real estate investor by nature, but to his clients, co-workers and friends, Sam J. Saad III is first and foremost a tenacious problem-solver.

"His ability to analyze a situation and come up with a suitable solution is impressive," says client and commercial broker George Vukobratovich, president of Naples-based Welsh Companies Florida, Inc. "I've worked with him on a couple of major commercial real estate deals and he did a great job of structuring very complex transactions."

It's a skill that has significantly contributed to the success of The Law Office of Sam J. Saad III, which Saad established in Naples in 2007. Most of the firm's work is concentrated in Collier, Lee and Charlotte counties, although it also has clients in DeSoto, Hendry, Bay, Hillsborough, Orange, Broward, Miami-Dade, Palm Beach, Sarasota and Duval counties.

Primarily focused on residential and commercial real estate law, the firm provides a wide range of services to property owners, brokers, investors and tenants, as well as condo/homeowner associations, non-profit organizations and small businesses. For some clients, Saad and his firm play a key role in whether or not a transaction will close.

"You can't transact real estate without clear title," says Gregg Barr, senior VP with Encore Bank in Naples. "When there's an issue with documentation or a cloud on the title, it's good to have a lawyer who knows how to solve those problems."

In recent years, the bank has turned to Saad for assistance with commercial real estate closings and litigation. "He does a lot of our title work and provides excellent legal advice," says Barr. "He's a pleasure to work with, too. With Sam, what you see is what you get."



▲ Attorney Sam Saad in his Naples office on Airport Road South.

BIG FIRM EXPERTISE, SMALL FIRM FEES

In addition to residential and commercial closings, much of the firm's work involves landlord/tenant law, such as drafting or reviewing leases and property management agreements, handling evictions and addressing deposit disputes.

The practice also helps clients navigate the intricacies of estate planning, including the crafting of land trusts, wills and trusts, as well as 1031 Like-Kind Exchanges. Foreclosure solutions, litigation/mediation and small business representation are just a few of its other services.

Saad says that all of his firm's "common-sense legal solutions" are designed to help individuals and small

business owners succeed. What's more, all services are structured to be affordable and in some cases, are rendered for a flat rate.

"Many people are afraid to seek help from an attorney because they think it will be too expensive," says Saad. "I think what separates our firm from others in the area is that we provide high-quality, big-firm experience with small-firm pricing and attention. We don't want to be expensive. We want to be valuable. We pride ourselves on that."

COMMERCIAL INVESTMENT KNOWLEDGE

Having successfully bought and sold a significant amount of residential and commercial real estate starting at age 17, Saad is adept at the art of the

deal. Nonetheless, he's always willing to learn new ways to structure investments, no matter how difficult. For instance, when George Vukobratovich asked if he could structure a single 1031 Tax-Deferred Exchange for multiple investors, Saad went to great lengths to educate himself on the subject.

"Up until this year, there hadn't been a vehicle for placing more than one investor into a 1031," says Vukobratovich. "Sam was familiar with (the new legal requirements), but he wasn't willing to make recommendations as a lawyer without thoroughly understanding the technicalities so that everything complied with the IRS code." After extensive research, Saad was able to construct a land trust that would work with a 1031. It's a vehicle that Vukobratovich describes as "a very sophisticated way" to do a 1031.

"Sam did a tremendous job researching everything and brought a great value to potential clients and investors," says Vukobratovich. "At the same time, he was very reasonable with his billing (because, he said) it was information he thought he should know as a professional."

In other cases, Saad relies on outside experts for assistance, particularly when the transaction involves atypical property types. For example, due to the growing demand for rock used in building new homes and roads, Southwest Florida quarries and mining operations have become an increasingly hot commodity. Although Saad's firm is skilled at matching opportunities and buyers, and drafting the legal documents needed to close transactions, it lacks the technical expertise to properly evaluate the land itself.

"There's a lengthy due-diligence process with mining-related transactions," Saad says. "You have to conduct your own geotechnical surveys and research before you can decide whether you want to own the property and/or the mining business," which often means hiring specialty contractors such as geophysicists and engineers.

LEGAL ADVANTAGES

While the average real estate transaction may not require the services of a law firm, legal assistance often saves owners and sellers considerable time



▲ Saad and senior counsel David Lupo meet with the owner of a small business.

and money. In fact, most commercial investors wouldn't consider buying, selling or leasing property without one. Typically, they contact Saad's firm well in advance of a closing.

"It's advisable to protect the asset prior to ownership, particularly if the property will be rented seasonally or annually," says Saad. "We would assist in that process," which usually involves setting up a Limited Liability Corporation (LLC) or trust and deeding the property to it, and establishing a sales-tax account with the state.

The Law Office of Sam J. Saad III can also assist clients after the closing by coordinating professional management that will maintain and maximize its value. "To get the rents and the right tenant mix, you need strong leases and an attorney who understands what it means to be in the rental business," he says, adding that his office works with third-party management companies to keep their clients' commercial properties pristine, inside and out.

Although foreclosures and distress sales have diminished significantly in the last few years, many investors still seek opportunities in distressed assets. To help those clients, Saad's office can draft maintenance agreements, construction contracts or any other legal documents needed to expedite the property's post-purchase turnaround.

OTHER PRACTICE AREAS

The Law Office of Sam J. Saad III also represents clients in civil cases, not all of them related to real estate. Senior litigation counsel Gary Green assists clients with medical malpractice, defamation, fraud, products liability, personal injury and premises liability, among other cases.

However, most of the firm's non-real estate-related work is outside of the courtroom, handling the intricacies of forming, owning and operating a small business or non-profit organization. Usually, business clients seek legal expertise in drafting and reviewing contracts, employment agreements and succession plans, as well as assistance with debt collections and business sales/purchases.

Another practice area focuses on protecting intellectual property, such as copyrights, license agreements and trademarks. For those who wish to safeguard their original ideas, corporate names and other creative works, the process is best left to a professional, as Ramon Padilla, DDS, will attest.

Padilla is the owner and founder of a flourishing local dental practice, which recently changed its name to Dental Designs. Since its founding in Naples in 2004, it has expanded to a second location in Fort Myers, and currently boasts

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Sam J. Saad III

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a staff of 35. However, in 2015, after 11 years in business, Padilla was told by another dental practice about a potential problem with his company's name.

"There was a conflict with the interpretation of our name, not the name itself," says Padilla. "But we knew we'd have a problem if we continued using it, so we decided to rebrand and rename the practice. In order to do it, we knew we needed an attorney," and contacted Saad.

Once Padilla decided on the name, Saad's office "did all the legwork" to obtain a national trademark for it. That way, if Dental Designs expands to other Florida counties or other states, it can do so with impunity. "Sam took us through the entire process, so it was really very easy," says Padilla, adding that addressing the conflict technically was less expensive than pursuing it legally.

"Sam and his staff fulfilled everything that we expected and made the process as painless as possible," says Padilla. "They've been phenomenal."

COMMITMENT TO CLIENTS, COMMUNITY

Saad prides himself and his staff on being extremely attentive and accessible to clients. "It's a very competitive market, so we have to provide the highest level



▲ Saad conducts a closing with a couple buying their first home.

of personal service," he says. In addition to returning phone calls and emails the same day, Saad also gives clients his cell phone number for anytime access.

But despite his seemingly 24/7 work schedule, Saad is equally committed to his family, friends and community. Since 2010, he has served on the Naples City Council, where he "worked hard and did his homework," according to John Sorey, a close friend and former Naples mayor. Although Sorey has since retired from politics, it was he who urged Saad to run for city council.

"He's a bright guy and very direct, which I see as a plus," says Sorey. "When we worked on council together, I could always count on him to answer tough questions and get things done." But it's Saad's selflessness that has impressed Sorey the most.

"As an attorney, billable hours is the key," Sorey says. "Sam's made a significant economic sacrifice to serve the people and the city as a council person. People think that we only spend about 24-30 hours a month (on the job), but it's probably closer to 100 hours a month. Plus, some people won't like the decisions you make, so you have to have a pretty tough skin."

Saad's second and last term on the city council expires this coming February, allowing him more time to focus on his business. However, he says it's not his goal to dominate the market. "We expect our office to grow organically," prompting the need for another real estate specialist and an additional commercial litigator within the next five years. ✍

LandQwest's Adam Palmer To Lead Florida CCIM Chapter

Adam Palmer, CCIM, has been named **2018 President of the Florida CCIM Chapter of CCIM Institute**.

Palmer is a principal and managing director with LandQwest Commercial, a full-service commercial real estate firm based in Fort Myers.

LandQwest is the only company to have three past/current Florida CCIM Chapter presidents. Besides Palmer, whose term begins in January, the group includes **Cynthia Shelton, CCIM, CRE**, senior managing director & qualifying broker (1996) and **Kane Morris-Webster, CCIM**, senior director (2011).



Adam Palmer

"I am truly honored to represent the approximately 900 chapter members across this great state," said Palmer. "For 50 years, CCIM has been the benchmark of excellence for commercial real estate practitioners."

Currently, Palmer is president-elect of the 2017 Florida CCIM Chapter, which boasts approximately 900 members statewide. He has also served

as president of the Southwest Florida CCIM District and president of the Commercial Investment Professionals.

"We are extremely proud of Adam," said **John Mounce**, LandQwest's founding principal. "To be elected by his

peers (reflects) his dedication, strong work ethic and reputation of success and integrity."

In addition to Palmer, the other members of the 2018 Florida CCIM Chapter Executive Committee are: **Tina Marie Eloian, CCIM**, president-elect; **Yakhin Israel, CCIM**; vice president/finance; **Jose Maria Serrano, CCIM**, vice president/chapter operations; **Bev Larson, CCIM**, vice president/administration; **Bill Dehlinger, CCIM**, vice president/education.

For more information on LandQwest or to reach Palmer, please visit LQWEST.com or call 239-275-4922. To learn more about CCIM chapters and CCIM Institute's education and designation program, visit ccim.com.