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Founded to Last

Balestreri Potocki & Holmes rooted in founding values—collegiality, professionalism, teamwork

By Kamila Knaut
Daily Journal Staff Writer

Since its founding, Balestreri Potocki & Holmes ALC has undergone name changes, expanded its practice areas and more than doubled in size.

But what has stayed the same since 1991 has been the firm's values — collegiality, professionalism and teamwork — say the attorneys who work there.

"I wanted it to be an enjoyable place to work, a place that you would be proud to say, 'I work for that firm,'" said Thomas Balestreri, reflecting on his mission when he founded the firm in San Diego. "I take a lot of pride in making this a welcoming firm that is very inclusive."

Cooperative, collegial, ethical and responsive is how Shawn D. Morris of Morris, Sullivan & Lemkul LLP described the firm and its attorneys.

Morris, who has been opposing counsel against the Balestreri firm on numerous occasions added, "They're a pleasure to work with. If I had to define them I would define them as extremely ca-



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From left: member Matthew Stohl, shareholder Thomas Balestreri, of counsel Susan Sparks and associate Robin H. Smith

pable lawyers. I would define them as very professional at all times — both inside and outside the courtroom."

Neal H. Rockwood of Rockwood & Noziska LLP added that the Balestreri firm's attorneys always stick to their word and know how to evaluate a case.

"It's nice to have defense counsel on the other side that knows what they're doing and actually knows how to represent their client properly," Rockwood said. "That's what they do that sets them apart from a lot of other defense firms."

Founded on construction litigation, Balestreri Potocki & Holmes is named for shareholders Balestreri, Joseph P. Potocki and Karen Holmes, who retired in 2018.

The firm consists of 14 transactional and trial attorneys who specialize in nine practice areas including commercial general liability, product liability, real estate and property, business law, and intellectual property.

Notable cases the firm has been involved in include litigation related to the Millennium Tower in San Francisco, and representing

the City of San Diego in the *Sheng Du v. City of San Diego* in 2019. *Sheng Du v. City of San Diego et al.*, 37-2018-00010639 (S.D. Super Ct, filed March 2, 2018)

Other San Diego cases the firm has handled include *The Mark Condominium Owners Association v The Mark condominiums LLC*, 00049168 (S.D. Super Ct, filed May 17, 2013), which was settled confidentially and for which Morris was opposing counsel.

What sets the firm apart from the rest, according to Potocki, is experience as well

as the leaders' heavy involvement in all cases.

"Tom and I have our hands in every case and are involved with them. We don't just get cases that come in and then farm them off to other people in the firm and have no involvement," he explained.

The firm's system is that a member is always assigned to a case and is in charge of overseeing it, no matter how it originated.

"We make sure that happens no matter who brings a case so that the client has a level of comfort that we're bringing our experience and expertise to bear on whatever type of matter we're handling for them," said Balestreri.

The firm also ensures that the attorneys develop a common set of goals with the client and always work toward those goals.

"Everything that we do should be geared towards

getting to that goal," Balestreri added.

Looking back at the firm's beginning, Balestreri feels the biggest challenge the firm has had to face has been broadening its services from its bread and butter practice: construction litigation.

"We tried to market other services to our clients and that's helped us to broaden our base out of construction," added Balestreri.

The firm has also used its attorneys' interests to diversify its practice by encouraging them to branch out and pursue cases that intrigue them, said Potocki.

"I also think it helps people to develop their own professional growth," explained Potocki. "Not everyone has the same interest in life and people like to do different things. So long as it's compatible with our practice and doesn't create issues with clients or other areas, I think it's a good thing for

people to pursue what they want to do."

By identifying attorneys' interests, the firm is able to mentor and give them the opportunity to gain experience, creating new practice areas throughout the process.

"For example, Anthony Chalifoux, one of our members, wanted to do intellectual property," explained Balestreri. "So we just kind of gradually kept finding ways for him to learn more about that practice or get more experienced in that practice area, and now he's handling trademark copyright infringement applications and trademark and trade secret disputes for the craft beer and cannabis industry."

"I want to continue to do just that, give people a chance to develop their interests and reach their career goals," he added. "I've reached my goal. I've achieved all the professional goals I set out to achieve and I think now,

what I really ... enjoy most and what I look forward to doing, as I continue to practice, is to teach people how to be not just good, but great lawyers."

According to the firm's members: Matthew Stohl, Chalifoux, Michael C. Rogers and Eric J. Miersma, what they enjoy most is being able to work as a team together alongside Potocki and Balestreri, and how they are able to grow their practices the way they want and need.

Stohl explained, "I've never seen anyone lose their temper or get upset. It's always about working together, solving the problem and representing your clients the best you can and that's a really comforting feeling in a very stressful career."

"Once people come here, they tend to stay here for a very long time," added Miersma. ■

kamila_knaudt@dailyjournal.com