

Office Snapshot: Buchalter Grows At Swift Pace In San Diego

By James Mills

Law360 (April 25, 2024, 1:53 PM EDT) -- When Buchalter PC opened its San Diego office in March 2018 with two lawyers, firm CEO Adam Bass hoped the office might reach about 25 attorneys after six years.

Instead the office located in the 655 West Broadway building in the city's downtown hit that number after only three years, and now it has 50 attorneys.

"San Diego for us was a natural place. We never hesitated" to open in the city, Bass said. "I just didn't think that we would grow at the pace we grew."

For its sixth anniversary, Buchalter gave the San Diego office a complete makeover designed to create a welcoming space that has a "similar look and feel to the city we are in while maintaining the Buchalter brand," Bass said.

"Buchalter approaches office makeovers with the goals of turning the space into a place you want to be," he added — a space that is conducive to collaboration and where lawyers are proud to have clients visit.

Bass is quick to point out the office's accelerated growth happened naturally. Buchalter didn't merge with another San Diego firm to raise its numbers quickly or bring in large groups of attorneys, he said. "This was trench warfare, one lawyer at a time," Bass said. "It keeps the culture that we want and the people that we're really interested in having. Most of our growth is all about the people. That's the number one way we grow."

Tracy Warren, the San Diego office's managing shareholder, explained the expansion has come primarily from attorneys calling who wanted to join the office.

"We are being intentional about who we bring on board," Warren said.



Buchalter's newly renovated San Diego office offers a sleek, contemporary look, with a state-of-the-art conference room and views with San Diego Bay and Coronado Island in the distance. (Courtesy of Buchalter)



Renovated conference rooms include state-of-the-art technology including one-touch Zoom connectivity. (Courtesy of Buchalter)

"We say the best recruiters are the people who work for us. They are so sold on the culture, they are getting other people to come to us. Many people will tell me they have never seen an office environment or culture like this."

She's especially proud they speak 10 different languages in the office, which also has more female attorneys than males.

"We welcome diversity. We are a majority female. They have said to me: 'You shine a light on me, along with Adam, where my other firm did not. You allowed me to breathe and actually excel.'" Warren said. "I don't think I allowed them to do anything. I just get out of the way and let their talents speak for themselves."

The Leader

Buchalter, which started in Los Angeles in 1933 and has always had a significant LA presence, had long been eyeing San Diego for expansion, Bass said.

It was just a matter of finding the right people to start the office there, he said.

That right person came in the form of Warren, a labor and employment attorney who's "truly excited about what has happened in our San Diego office and brings such a wonderful, positive vibe," Bass said.

"Tracy is an energetic person. It's boundless," Bass said. "She is a cheerleader and supporter and coach of those around her. She just wants everybody to succeed. That's a really good skill to have when you're building anything."



Tracy Warren

Warren, a New Jersey native who played softball in high school and college, initially went into broadcast journalism and assumed that's where she'd spend the rest of her career. Then by chance, she got into the University of Notre Dame, the Law School, and figured a legal career was meant to be.

In addition to being a labor and employment attorney, Warren also serves as co-chair of Buchalter's sports practice group. She's represented coaches in various negotiations and has gone before the National Collegiate Athletic Association's committee on infractions. plus done investigations related to Title IX.

Warren credits her sports experience for helping make her a better lawyer and a better leader, saying the desire to win but also operate within a team environment is crucial to both sports and a law office.

Warren also says her sports broadcasting background has been crucial to her success as an attorney.

"Broadcasters who listen the most help get the best out of the people they are interviewing," Warren said. "It's the same way in law. If we listen and really are actively listening, we can hear what people want out of their career, out of a case, out of settlement, out of a trial victory. That has been really key to me. Listening comes into play to getting to know people and getting them to perform professionally."

Although she's been a licensed attorney for 25 years, Warren didn't abandon her sports broadcasting career entirely.

"I still do broadcasting for the Pac-12 network," she said. "I broadcast women's college basketball and softball on my weekends. So, I work here during the week and on my weekend, I do Pac-12 or other entity sports."

The Location

With views of San Diego Bay and Coronado Island, Buchalter's office is located at 655 West Broadway, a 23-story high-rise that opened in 2005 in the heart of downtown San Diego.

The building, which is just three blocks from the Broadway pier and the city's harbor, includes a fitness center and a wellness room, which can be used for meditation, lactation and napping, according to its website.

Although the firm originally opened in a nearby building, Warren was enthusiastic about 655 West Broadway. Bass saw that another law firm had left its office in the building, but was still paying rent on the vacant space. Since it was already set up for a law firm, Bass arranged to take over the lease.

Bass never worried about taking over a space that didn't pan out for another law firm, saying, "I always knew we were going to succeed."

Over the next six years, the firm kept taking over more and more office space, until it had all 22,000 square feet of the building's 16th floor, plus part of another floor.

However, as a result of gradually assuming more and more adjoining office space, Buchalter also had a mishmash of styles and design schemes.

Warren described the original space as "outdated and sterile."

The makeover, which was completed in December, took almost a year and was done in phases and primarily at night to pose minimal disruptions to work.

Along the way, the firm added technology to allow for one-touch Zoom connectivity in conference rooms plus standing desks for improved ergonomics. Side lights and glass were installed so all attorneys and staff have access to natural light as well as the views.

To top it all off, they added contemporary art from internationally acclaimed local artist Aaron Chang.

Now that the makeover is complete, the staff and attorneys approve, Warren said.

"Everyone seems happier here, now that the entire floor looks like a single unified office," she said.

The Team

Total number of staff and attorneys 73

Total shareholders 20

Total associates 14

Total other attorneys 16

Total staff members 23

The Work

The office's first practice area was labor and employment, as that was Warren's specialty. Even now, six years after opening, labor and employment still continues to be one of the office's strongest practice areas.

Another especially strong area is a trusts and estates group "that is growing every day," Warren said.

"Part of that is they speak multiple languages, so we're able to cross the border and be able to service everyone," she said.

Also strong are the office's litigation and white collar group, along with the corporate group. Warren said the corporate group is growing steadily, as is the office's real estate practice.

Bass credits the office's rapid growth with allowing it to have so many strong practice areas.

"Our goal was to get a decent-sized office when you get around 20, 25 or 30. Then you can have a little bit of everything. You can have some corporate, some real estate, some litigation," Bass said. "We are a full service business law firm. Our goal is to provide things that businesses need. It takes a certain size to get all that."

Comings and Goings

The office has been busy growing in the past year, adding 13 attorneys — five shareholders, two senior counsel, two special counsel, one of counsel and three associates.

In July, litigator and white collar investigator Daniel Silva joined as a shareholder. He is a former assistant U.S. attorney who most recently worked as an in-house counsel for business payment system Stripe.

In August, corporate, tax, benefits and estate planning attorney Agustin Ceballos joined as a shareholder from boutique firm Seltzer Caplan McMahon Vitek.

In September, labor and employment attorney Craig Nickerson joined as a shareholder from Gordon Rees Scully Mansukhani LLP, also known as GRSM50.

Also in September, corporate attorney Ashley Teague joined as senior counsel after running her own firm for 12 years; litigator Christina Morgan joined as of counsel after being corporate counsel at Aya Healthcare; and labor and employment attorney Michelle Brookfield joined as an associate from Wilson Turner Kosmo LLP.

In October, intellectual property attorney Jose Patiño joined as a shareholder from Eversheds Sutherland and intellectual property attorney Siamak Hefazi joined as special counsel from Patterson & Sheridan LLP.

November saw a big influx of new arrivals, including litigator and insurance law attorney Emily Chaidez joining as senior counsel from Procopio Cory Hargreaves & Savitch LLP. Also in November, labor and employment attorney Nicholas M. Dea joined as an associate from GRSM50, while recent law school

graduate Taylor King joined as an associate after serving as a law clerk in the office during her final year of law school.

Then in January, corporate attorney Lionel Bochurberg joined as a shareholder from Musick Peeler & Garrett LLP, while labor and employment attorney Joseph Kracht joined as special counsel from GRSM50.

--Editing by Robert Rudinger.

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