

Inside Holwell Shuster's New York Office

By **Natalie Rodriguez**

Law360, New York (September 08, 2014, 3:57 PM ET) -- Building up a new firm from scratch is a tough task, but those at the helm of Holwell Shuster & Goldberg LLP are no strangers to stormy waters. The tenacious founding team — who were drawn together by a love of sailing — have boldly plowed forward on their boutique startup by filling a harbor-facing, nautical-themed office with young star attorneys and tough litigators.

The two-year-old Holwell Shuster took over the 39th floor of 125 Broad St. in a sublease deal with Sedgwick LLP after it quickly outgrew its original Madison Avenue offices. Now, with about 30 attorneys on hand, the litigation boutique is working tough cases from digs that boast head-turning water views, guided by the kind of leaders who hold laid-back, unconventional company outings on two of the partners' personal prized boats, *Manana* and *Another Miracle*.

The four founding partners have known each other for decades, having crossed paths at other firms where most of them bonded over their shared pastime of sailing — a hobby that can be seen in the vintage sailing maps, rare America's Cup prints and glass-encased boat replicas that are liberally sprinkled throughout the office.

"We reconnected to put the band together," Daniel P. Goldberg, a named partner, said. In some ways, "the law firm has been 30 years in the making."

While the physical office space sprawls over 35,680 square feet, the crew of attorneys is tight-knit and there is a liberal open-door policy among the higher-ups, who have made their names in blockbuster cases. They have represented banks in Enron-related securities class actions and guided major companies, including Comcast Corp., through antitrust litigation, to name some.

When the recent anniversary of D-Day saw a million rose petals showered on the Statue of Liberty, former Judge Richard J. Holwell — whose corner office sports views of Lady Liberty, as well as the Marine One helipad that the president uses — invited all the attorneys in for the best view.

Holwell stepped down from his federal judge position in the Southern District of New York to help found the firm after having presided over such headline-grabbing securities suits as the insider trading case against Galleon Group founder Raj Rajaratnam. A prominent figure in the legal community, he is still known to walk down the hallways and pop into partners' or associates' offices to bounce ideas around, according to associate Blair E. Kaminsky

"I know all the other associates' kids names and milestones. And Judge Holwell does, too," said Kaminsky on the camaraderie among the attorneys and staff.

Last Christmas, the associates banded together to purchase a caricature painting of the firm's partners riding the judge's prized sailing boat, Manana.

So far, the firm has been small enough to hold its annual July outing on that boat — a miniature replica of which sits in one of Holwell's office windows, which sometimes shake when a presidential helicopter lands at the Marine One helipad. For the most recent outing, however, Goldberg also brought his racing ship, Another Miracle, to accommodate the growing ranks of attorneys.

Friday mornings at Holwell Shuster bring an array of bagels for the attorneys and firm lunches often take place in the media room, where two big, flat-screen TVs recently offered everyone an opportunity to stay up on the World Cup soccer games. Usually, though, those TVs aren't powered up for dilly-dallying, but for going through case materials when the space is smoothly converted into a mock courtroom.

While the office is admittedly out of the way from the more centralized Midtown neighborhoods that often draw law firms, the downtown area's cobblestone-laden, historical vibe is a plus in the eyes of most of the attorneys. Goldberg, for one, thinks the anti-cookie-cutter feel falls in line with the firm's culture, which he says is focused on delivering elite legal services through its crackerjack team of experts with more efficiency and focus than some bigger firms can provide.

"I think our firm is different," echoed Kaminsky, a complex commercial litigator who has become so charmed by the local vibe that she's made peace with her longer commute.

And there are plenty of perks to the area, beyond the view and Old World feel. When the attorneys venture out of the office, nearby Stone Street, which is laden with restaurants and bars, is the favored hangout, Kaminsky notes. And there's no having to suffer through mobs of tourists or blaring taxi cabs when running out for lunch.

The fledgling firm moved into the space in December 2012, right after Superstorm Sandy tore through the downtown area, temporarily taking out the building's parking garage and elevators. For many of the firm's partners, that event solidified that it was the right space for the startup boutique.

"We were proud to be part of a community effort to revitalize lower Manhattan. It was something much bigger than us, and it gave us added purpose," Goldberg said.

The water views, which stretch out for miles, don't hurt either, of course. "Sometimes I have to close the shades to get my work done," Goldberg said, chuckling.

But idyllic comforts aside, the firm is focused on making a name for itself in the competitive New York market and is filling its ranks with smart, young attorneys and pros who are hungry for a challenge.

Some of the firm's most recent work has included representing the Federal Housing Finance Agency in its various suits against banks over residential mortgage-backed securities and helping to defend Visa Inc. in sprawling litigation over its and other credit card companies' interchange fees.

"People who come here come from awesome firms and want to work on hard cases," Kaminsky said. A 2008 Harvard Law School graduate, Kaminsky has helped represent NYSE Euronext in litigation over its

proposed \$10 billion merger with Deutsche Boerse and has assisted JPMorgan Chase in bankruptcy litigation related to the closeout of derivatives transactions facing Lehman Brothers.

When she first stepped into the offices about six months ago, Kaminsky said she was struck most by the feeling that Holwell Shuster is on the brink of doing great things. "There was something intangible and exciting about walking in here," she said.

A large chunk of the offices is empty, but the firm is steadily growing into the space. A recent addition was intellectual property partner John DiMatteo, whose recruitment launched an entirely new practice for the firm.

DiMatteo has already added to the firm's growing accomplishments with a settlement in June for Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory in a long-running patent malpractice case.

As luck would have it, DiMatteo also has an affinity for boating and has outfitted his new office space with vintage-style nautical paraphernalia of his own, including a large wooden trunk.

The decorating choices, of course, fit right in at the boutique, where there is no firm artwork per se and where every stitch of decor has been brought in by attorneys in a collaborative effort to add their own mark to the space.

"It's not quite a sailing museum, but it's close," Goldberg jokes.

--Photography by Cara Salvatore. Editing by Kelly Duncan.