

Hunton & Williams Pads RE Group With 4 SNR Denton Partners

By **Karlee Weinmann**

Law360, New York (June 11, 2012, 3:42 PM ET) – Hunton & Williams LLP added four real estate finance partners from SNR Denton, advancing its bid to become a top legal player in New York's real estate industry, the firm said Sunday.

The four-attorney team — Brett L. Gross, Peter J. Mignone, Donald F. Simone and Mitchell G. Williams — has been together through a lot already. Their office was in the World Trade Center on Sept. 11, and they saw their former firm, Thacher Proffitt & Wood LLP, fall apart.

“We've stuck together and continue to stick together,” Mignone told Law360, noting that he and Gross joined Thacher Proffitt straight out of law school in the late 1990s, where they were mentored by veterans Simone and Williams.

In their latest roles, they push the number of lawyers in Hunton & Williams' fast-expanding real estate division past 50. With the quartet's experience, the firm gains an edge in the lending-related services it can provide its clients, New York real estate group chair Carl F. Schwartz said in a statement.

“Hunton & Williams has taken another important step toward becoming the go-to real estate practice in New York with this addition,” he said. “Our new partners' tremendous lending experience is the perfect complement to our practice in serving owners, operators, funds, [real estate investment trusts] and capital market players across the real estate spectrum.”

The team's addition comes on the heels of Schwartz's own April appointment. Also in April, partner Laurie A. Grasso joined the practice.

Mignone said his team ultimately settled on Hunton & Williams because the firm appreciated how they work collaboratively. Each attorney works with the others' clients to offer more well-rounded services, he said.

“It's important for a place to understand that approach,” he said. “We think it's actually more valuable, and our clients appreciate that, because it gives us a critical depth in the industry ... it's not a one-man band show.”

Each of the attorneys works in the real estate finance realm, and the growing presence of Hunton & Williams' related practice was also a draw, Mignone said.

“We just see Hunton & Williams as a firm that has an outstanding position in the commercial real estate field, and has a long-term commitment to not just real estate, but capital finance,” he said. “That's one of its core practice groups, and that's what we're in.”

Gross' work has centered on secured financings, with an emphasis on helping institutional lenders nail down commercial mortgage and mezzanine loans. He represented a lender in the origination of a multibillion-dollar mortgage and mezzanine loan, and has advised on the origination of several credit facilities valued in the hundreds of millions as well.

In addition to working with institutional lenders, Gross also has counseled REITs, borrowers and a commercial real estate finance company through big-ticket deals and loan workouts.

Like Gross, Simone's commercial real estate background has included advising lenders and investors on all aspects of secured financings, with a focus on the commercial mortgages and mezzanine loans. He has also tackled construction and hospitality lending, along with credit lending and co-lending and participation arrangements.

Mignone hones in on commercial real estate finance and capital markets, counseling primarily lender and investor clients through secured financings, in addition to loan workouts and restructurings.

His landmark deals include advising institutional lenders in connection with the \$1.2 billion financing for an acquisition of a REIT that holds more than 50 shopping malls, the representation of lenders involved in the \$900 million refinancing of a portfolio of eight high-end office buildings, plus a lender linked to an \$80 million equity investment in a New York hotel.

Williams' work has had a New York focus, including the representation of investment banks, insurance companies and pension funds through numerous permanent and construction financings in the city. He has also worked with clients nationwide and in multistate transactions.

He was tapped as counsel to the Mortgage Bankers Association of New York through its drafting and adoption of the New York creditors' rights endorsement, which protected lenders and owners from losses or damages under certain circumstances.

Gross earned his law degree at Cornell Law School, Simone at Boston University School of Law, Mignone at Fordham University School of Law and Williams at New York Law School.

—Editing by Kat Laskowski.

All Content © 2003-2012, Portfolio Media, Inc.