

# Daily Journal

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## Great Expectations

*Greenberg Gross LLP's attorneys have a reputation for tenaciously pursuing high-profile cases.*

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Daily Journal Staff Writer

**C**OSTA MESA — After a federal appeals court stripped the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau of its independence last week, Greenberg Gross LLP gained a national distinction: It's pursuing one of the few remaining lawsuits against PHH Corp., the mortgage lender that challenged the now-weakened regulatory giant.

For most young, boutique firms, such a case might be considered a huge coup. For the partners at Greenberg Gross, it's an expected result of their dedication to outperforming major law firms through a cutting-edge approach in which no fight is too big.

"If you had, heaven forbid, a bet-the-business case where everything was at stake, what would you want from your lawyer?," said co-founder Wayne R. Gross, who led the U.S. Attorney's Office in Orange County before going into private practice in 2007. "It's not just getting the best and the brightest. It's getting those lawyers to work hard — extremely hard — with a purpose."

Greenberg Gross' class action against PHH Corp. — whose separate challenge of a CFPB fine led to the recent appellate ruling — is outside the firm's base portfolio of defense work. But that doesn't surprise attorneys who've watched the firm emerge as a force since it opened in Costa Mesa three years ago.

"They're not afraid to represent individuals ... against some of the largest companies in Southern California," said John C. Hueston, name partner at Hueston Hennigan LLP and a former colleague of Gross at the U.S. Attorney's Office. "That really is a distinguishing thing about them."

Now the firm is taking what its partners describe as a logical next step. It's expanding to Los Angeles,



Christopher Todd Studios / Courtesy Greenberg Gross LLP

The Greenberg Gross leadership team in their Costa Mesa offices. Top row, from left: Michael I. Katz, Wayne R. Gross, Alan A. Greenberg, Howard M. Privette. Bottom row, from left: Susan R. Hershman, Evan C. Borges, Aluyah I. Imoisili.

with 28-year corporate law veteran Howard M. Privette, who left Paul Hastings LLP for Greenberg Gross earlier this year, as managing partner of a downtown, high-rise office that's expected to open next month.

Privette plans to bring the same energy to that office that's captivated him in Costa Mesa.

"It's a collaborative, creative energy that I quite honestly haven't experienced in this way at other firms," Privette said.

Gross and co-founder Alan A. Greenberg permanently joined forces after they won a \$50.3 million jury verdict on a counterclaim in a lawsuit related to the development of the Hollywood Palladium while at Greenberg Traurig LLP in 2011.

They scored a similar victory at Greenberg Gross last year, winning \$11.8 million on a cross complaint on behalf of the engineering company Cavotec SA against a former executive. *Colaco et al. v. Cavotec S.A. et al.*, 2012-00601735 (O.C. Super. Ct., filed Oct. 1, 2012).

The firm's current client list includes Lowe's, the Auto Club of Southern California, the social net-

working app Grindr and the insurance giant American International Group, Inc.

The firm also has several cases in New York, including its representation of Frontline Corporation Services against a private equity fund accused of misleading investors about its involvement with former hedge fund manager Raj Rajaratnam.

"When the stakes are high, they're without a doubt the only firm we turn to," said Christina M. Zabat-Fran, general counsel for St. John Knits, an Irvine-based women's clothing line. "They absolutely get what matters most to general counsel."

As chair of the Orange County Bar Association's business and corporate law section, Zabat-Fran organizes presentations for the group that feature corporate law's top minds. Greenberg Gross attorneys always draw the biggest crowds.

"I think it's because they're extraordinarily engaging as attorneys," she said. "They talk in a way that's real and authentic."

Greenberg Gross attorneys pride themselves on transferring that authenticity into all aspects of the

practice. They strive to set themselves apart through high standards and cutting edge innovations such as the addition of a moot court room — both Los Angeles and Costa Mesa are getting one — and a commitment to maintaining large office footprints when other firms are downsizing.

The firm's salaries are at the top of the industry. As of July, first-year associates make \$180,000, up from \$160,000, in keeping with the top-market compensation established by Cravath Swaine & Moore LLP in New York. Firm partners require courtroom attire in the office, and they place critical importance on crisp writing, from trial briefs to inter-office emails.

"Their passion shows in their briefs. They tell a compelling story," said Jason B. Shandell, president and general counsel at Amphastar Pharmaceuticals Inc., which Greenberg Gross is representing in a 9th Circuit appeal concerning a whistleblower claim.

The number of partners at the 17-lawyer firm recently rose to six with the addition of Aluyah I. Imoisili from Milbank Tweed Hadley & Mc-Cloy LLP's Los Angeles office, and U.S. Attorney's Office veteran Susan R. Hershman last month joined as senior counsel.

Both will play a key role in the LA expansion, with Imoisili overseeing hiring and continuing to litigate complex cases, including a trade secret dispute involving engineers who left Broadcom for SpaceX.

Hershman, who handled civil fraud matters as an Assistant U.S. Attorney in Los Angeles, will lead the firm's False Claims Act practice group.

She said Greenberg Gross seeks to incorporate the best traditions of the U.S. Attorney's Office: The firm strives to make a difference and has well-trained, highly motivated attorneys.

"In fact, I would say this is better," Hershman said.