

Counsel^{to} Counsel

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ON THE COVER

**An Extended Family:
The Interface Group and
Duane Morris LLP**

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An Extended

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The Interface Group and Duane Morris LLP

By Scott M. Gawlicki

If ever a general counsel has benefited from consolidating and assigning much of his or her company’s outside work to a national, multiple-city law firm, it is Paul G. Roberts.

Roberts is vice president and general counsel of the Needham, Mass.-based Interface Group, a diverse group of business corporations, trusts, partnerships, limited liability companies, and other entities owned and controlled by four individuals and their families. Its partners are involved in operating businesses and passive investments, including an international travel agency and tour operator, hotels, a convention center, aircraft, commercial and residential real estate development, plays, movies, restaurants, radio and television stations, and numerous philanthropic activities.

Its majority partner, Sheldon G. Adelson, owns businesses in and outside the United States, including the grandest of Las Vegas resorts, the 4,000-suite Venetian Resort Hotel Casino; Sands Expo and Convention Center; and the Sands Macau, a gaming resort located along the “Cotai Strip” on China’s southeastern coast.

Needless to say, the group’s legal requirements are as diverse as its holdings. Given an environment where legal fees were skyrocketing, Roberts—The Interface Group’s one-man legal band—was determined to bring down costs without any loss in service. That’s why he opted

three years ago to consolidate much of his outside work with an equally diverse law firm, Duane Morris LLP.

“I’m a hands-on guy. I’m not good at delegating. But this position simply outstripped my capabilities,” Roberts says. “Duane Morris has 20 offices and expertise somewhere within the organization in a wide variety of legal areas. Regardless of the situation, I know I can call their Boston office and within an hour or two they will connect me with the right person—an attorney who has been briefed, understands my concerns and knows exactly what I need at the moment.”

Roberts’ primary contact is Martin B. Shulkin, managing partner of the Duane Morris Boston office, an experienced business lawyer with expertise in corporate governance and mergers and acquisitions.

“I know the firm so well that I can quickly identify and access other attorneys in every office,” Shulkin says. “That’s important because The Interface Group is involved with so many different kinds of deals in so many different places.”

Doing the Right Thing

In one instance Roberts needed assistance with a personnel matter at GWV Travel, one of The Interface Group’s primary operating businesses. Shulkin brought in Bronwyn L. Roberts (no relation to Paul Roberts), a Boston associate who practices employment law.

Family



Photography by Tim Walker

Paul G. Roberts (left), The Interface Group, Martin B. Shulkin and Franklin H. Levy, Duane Morris LLP.

“Paul wanted guidance on employer obligations with regard to the FMLA [Family and Medical Leave Act] and the ADA [Americans with Disabilities Act]. I also helped him through the interaction process, which involved gathering information on the employee’s health condition,” Bronwyn Roberts explains. “It was a sensitive matter that required a lot of thought. Paul is very compassionate. He really wanted and needed to do the right thing by the employee and he did that.”

“The relationship is very comfortable,” she adds. “Paul feels confident calling me directly, which is fine. That’s one of the good things about Duane Morris. As law firms go, there’s not as much of a hierarchical structure. The client is free to work directly with all levels of the team.”

Strategic Thinking

With the group’s partners involved in such a diverse collection of businesses—the current docket also includes companies like Farberware, Inc., iMDsoft, U.S. Franchise Systems, Inc., ArKion Systems, Inc., Corporate Incentive Solutions, American Employers Group, Inc., Deluxe Hotel Supply LLC, Sonic Telecom, University City Realty and Danskin—Roberts’ strategy is to continue to move more and more of his outside work to Duane Morris.

For example, when one portfolio company sought a financing package, its bank requested background on its intellectual property holdings, including its U.S. and international trademark registrations and licenses. In that particular case, Shulkin brought in a partner in the firm’s New York City office who practices

intellectual property and trademark law. This work has since expanded to the management of other properties in the group’s patent and trademark portfolio.

Duane Morris was called upon again when a company, in which one of The Interface Group partners had interest, acquired a Maryland-based business and a creditor filed suit against the purchaser. In that case, Roberts needed representation in Maryland. Shulkin, in turn, notified the firm’s Washington, D.C., office.

“That’s what’s great about this relationship. Instead of having to take the time to hunt for an attorney in Maryland, I just picked up the phone and called Marty,” Roberts says. “I didn’t have to deal with a stranger, someone who didn’t know who I was and to whom my business meant very little.”



Left to right, Franklin H. Levy, Duane Morris LLP, Paul G. Roberts, The Interface Group, Martin B. Shulkin and Bronwyn L. Roberts, Duane Morris LLP.

Yet another recent issue involved contracts and technology.

“We recently revamped the Web site for GWV Travel. The design company sent me a contract that included a lot of industry jargon and technical provisions that was all foreign to me. So I sent Marty an email. He had two attorneys in Chicago review and revise it. I never met the guys—we worked by email and fax—but it went very well. I guess that’s the miracle of modern technology,” Roberts says.

Comfort Factor

Duane Morris also affords Roberts the luxury of working with two attorneys he’s known for decades. Franklin H. Levy—a business and litigation specialist who joined Duane Morris as a partner in January—has known Roberts since grade school. They served together as outside counsel to The Interface Group at several law firms in the 1980s and ’90s. As long-time members of the Boston legal community, Roberts and Shulkin have

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known each other professionally and socially for more than 25 years.

“Yes, there is a comfort factor. Having known Paul for so many years, I know what he expects and the way he wants things done,” Levy says. “With Duane Morris, I do a lot of personal work for the partners—a whole range of services. I’ve known them for many years, too. They’re terrific people. I view them as an extended family.”

Indeed. Roberts tells a story in which he and Levy recently handled a litigation matter involving one of the group’s principals. With the case about to go to trial, the two needed to prepare the principal for testimony. He was in Israel with his daughter, who was about to give birth.

“So we hop on a plane and go to Israel and end up meeting with him in the hospital waiting room outside the maternity ward. Next thing you know, the baby is born and he runs up to see her. Then he comes back down and we continue,” Roberts says.

“When I came here, I had to get used to working by myself. I missed having other lawyers around to discuss ideas and problems and to use as a sounding board for possible approaches and solutions,” Roberts adds. “I’ve recaptured a lot of that with Duane Morris. It’s comforting to know I have that advice at the other end of the phone. I speak with them at least once or twice a day.” ●