

Diversity Is Key In Calif. Boutique Merger With Meyers Nave

By **Tim Ryan**

Law360 (September 3, 2020, 3:22 PM EDT) -- A commitment to diversity and a well-timed email from the managing principal of the firm persuaded the founder and owner of a Southern California employment law boutique to merge her practice with the California firm Meyers Nave.

Janice Brown, who founded Brown Law Group in 2003, is joining Meyers Nave Riback Silver & Wilson as an equity partner in a move she said will help give her clients access to more services at a statewide firm that has embraced diversity as an essential asset to its clients.

"I recognize just because of being active in issues that relate to diversity and also issues that relate to economic success with any firm that being a woman that had my own firm, a Black woman that had my own firm, was a special thing, and I never would have given that up if I didn't think that the thing I was going to next wasn't also a special thing," Brown told Law360.

Brown said she was exploring merger opportunities earlier this year when she received an email in January from David Skinner, the managing principal of Meyers Nave. Skinner described the email as an attempt to show the firm understood Brown's legal acumen and to let her know that Meyers Nave was looking for growth opportunities.

"I was just trying to convey to Janice that we are a culturally and financially healthy firm that is looking at opportunities and that we recognized what Janice has done over the years and it was an honor for us just to try and have a dialogue with her," Skinner told Law360.

A firm's understanding of and commitment to the importance of diversity was a key factor in any final decision to pursue a merger opportunity, Brown said, and a Valentine's Day meeting with high-ranking members of Meyers Nave that included two women and multiple people of color helped Brown see that the firm's values were aligned with her own.

"For me, it meant that they understood me and also understood people like me," Brown said in an interview. "There's just many more diverse clients, there are more diverse general counsel, there's more diverse in-house counsel, there's more diverse businesses. So for me they checked the box from the very beginning."

Brown has spent 35 years as a litigator and received her law degree from Gonzaga Law School. A former Justice Department attorney, Brown opened Brown Law Group in 2003 after launching its predecessor

in 1999. The firm specializes in employment and business litigation and has represented major companies including Allstate Insurance Company, NBC and Toyota, according to the firm's website.

Brown said her clients' reactions to the merger had been universally positive and that all, including the Los Angeles Chargers, Jerome's Furniture and Bank of America, would come along to Meyers Nave. Three other attorneys from Brown Law Group will also join the firm in the merger, Brown said.

Camille Hamilton Pating, who chairs Meyers Nave's labor and employment practice and attended the Valentine's Day meeting, said Brown and her team would help expand the firm's reach during a boom in both employment litigation and employers seeking advice on issues of racial equality.

In addition to her legal resume, Brown will also be an asset to the firm's culture, Pating said.

"Her experience, and not only that, but her impact within the firm as a leader, as a role model, as a mentor helping to develop younger attorneys, she's really the whole package, Pating told Law360.

Brown said she hopes the merger serves as a sign of hope for the people who saw the Brown Law Group as something to strive for.

"I have a lot of young people who have looked up at my firm and said, 'Wow, to have a woman own her own firm,' and I want them to continue to look up to me at this firm," Brown said. "Because this is the kind of opportunity you can get if you continue to stay true to your values and stay true to becoming a better person and a better lawyer, a better mentor, a better teacher, whatever all those aspects are that make you more valuable to whatever client or community that you're in."

--Editing by Peter Rozovsky