

BRIAN SHERR:

BUILDING STRONG COMMUNITIES



Broward real estate attorney Brian Sherr believes in building communities, not just new developments. In the past four decades, Sherr has dedicated countless hours to community causes, serving as president of the Jewish Federation of Greater Fort Lauderdale and Jewish Family Service, Broward County. He also launched First Southern Bank in Boca Raton and has guided the community bank for 22 years.

Brian is a really fine person with great integrity, says Broward State Attorney Michael J. Satz in Fort Lauderdale. He's a very giving person and a good friend. Just mention his name and people smile. He's that kind of person.

Recognizing Sherr's leadership through the years, the Broward County Commission proclaimed May 12, 2006 as "Brian J. Sherr Appreciation Day," and the Jewish National Fund presented Sherr with its Tree of Life Award the same year. Rabbi Kalman Packouz, executive director, Aish Hatorah Jerusalem, Miami Beach, says, "Brian has deep seated values and is passionate about whatever he does – his legal work, his philanthropic work and his spiritual commitments."

As an attorney, Sherr has represented developers, investors and property owners, putting together residential and commercial transactions that helped propel Broward's economy into the 21st century. He has also published a number of articles on condominium law, commercial landlord-tenant relations, real estate aspects of securities law and other topics for the Florida Bar Journal and other publications.

In 1991, Sherr joined Greenberg Traurig's Fort Lauderdale office, and helped lead its growth for 16 years. Now, he is managing shareholder emeritus of the 57-attorney office. "For me, life is a

learning process,” Sherr says. “Every day I learn from my clients, the lawyers here, my family and from people in the community. I’m learning all the time.”

MAKING AN IMPACT

Sherr was born and grew up in Jersey City, New Jersey. “I was attracted to law early in life,” he says, “I loved reasoning and didn’t mind arguing. I felt the law was a career where I could use my intellect.” After earning a bachelor’s degree at Rutgers University and his juris doctor at Boston University in 1970, Sherr decided to head for Florida.

As a law student, Sherr had clerked for Tobias Simon, a noted trial lawyer in Miami who was later recognized by The Florida Bar, which named its pro bono service award in his memory. “It was all gray up north and the light and the sun of South Florida attracted me, as well as the ability to make an impact as a young lawyer,” Sherr recalls.

When he arrived, Sherr went to work for Florida Rural Legal Services in Delray Beach, spending over three years representing migrant workers as a litigator in South and Central Florida. At the same time, he was increasingly attracted to real estate law.

“I loved the outdoors, and found myself spending a great deal of time in the fields where the migrants worked,” he says. “Then, I started seeing the fields being developed. Since I have always loved the concept of building things, real estate law and development seemed like a natural progression for me.”

In 1973, Sherr joined Ruden, Barnett, McClosky, Schuster & Schmerer and stayed with the Fort Lauderdale firm until 1981. He soon began doing real estate work, representing developers of communities in Broward, Palm Beach and other parts of the state. With his growing reputation, Sherr was tapped by a New York developer to help develop mixed-use communities in Iran before the ayatollah’s takeover in 1980.

“Brian was my first attorney when I went on my own, and he has been instrumental in my career,” says Richard Finkelstein, president, Kenco Communities, Inc. in Boca Raton. “He is always thinking of the possibilities and ramifications of anything that has to do with a printed document. I consider him family – his friendship and loyalty are second to none.”

In 1981, Sherr opened his own firm and grew it to 20 attorneys in less than a decade. In addition, he put together an investment group and founded First Southern Bank in 1987. Today, the bank, headquartered in Boca Raton, has five branches and more than \$400 million in assets. “I felt there was a need for community banking, and that turned out to be the case,” says Sherr, who has served as chairman of the board.

A COMMUNITY LEADER

In his professional and personal relationships, Sherr is known for his heart as well as his intellect. He and his wife Janet have three daughters, Alexa, a practicing attorney, Mallerie, a master’s degree student at New York University, and Elise, a University of Miami law student.

Back in the 1970s, Sherr helped transplant trees uprooted by the

construction of I-95 in Palm Beach County to the campus of Florida Atlantic University. Since then, he’s been an active community leader, serving on the Florida Atlantic University Foundation Board, the Museum of Art in Fort Lauderdale, the Broward Performing Arts Foundation, American Friends of Ariel, and the South Florida Symphony Orchestra. Sherr was a member of the initial board of directors for the National Ben Gamla Charter School Foundation Inc., which established the nation’s first Hebrew-English charter school in Hallandale, and a founder and current board member for the Daniel Cantor Senior Center in Tamarac.

Rabbi Packouz notes that one of Sherr’s ancestors was Rabbi Israel Bak, who founded the first printing press in Jerusalem in 1843 and built a neighborhood and a famous synagogue in Jerusalem. “It is a heritage which he holds dearly,” Packouz says. “Brian has deep-seated values and doing the right thing is always foremost.”



Brian Sherr receives the Jewish National Fund Tree of Life Award from Richard Finkelstein

ADVISING TODAY’S CLIENTS

As a younger lawyer, Sherr began as a litigator, an experience that serves him well in a difficult market with numerous distressed properties. He is also working to bring additional capital to First Southern Bank so it can help invigorate the local economy and bring more capital into the region.

“Legal disputes are more prevalent in this environment,” says Sherr, whose day-to-day practice largely involves sorting out the effects of the recession. “It’s not as glamorous as development, but in some senses it’s more important. In many cases, we are trying to dispose of distressed assets and work clients successfully out of problems.”

In early 2009, Sherr helped put together an investment group that acquired a Palm Beach County mall in a \$50 million cash transaction. The mall had been sold for \$260 million about two years before that, and the investors purchased the note on the mall from an insurance company at a substantial discount.

“Having gone through the 1989-93 real estate downturn, I see many of the same types of issues,” Sherr says. “It will take time for the commercial market to turn around, but that will happen.” ¹