

New Jersey Law Journal

**NEW JERSEY
LEGAL
AWARDS**

2021

PROFESSIONAL EXCELLENCE

SEPTEMBER 20, 2021

DEALMAKER OF THE YEAR



COURTESY PHOTOS

Mitchell Berkey, Gemma Giantomasi, and Jeffrey Gussoff, with Chiesa, Shahinian & Giantomasi PC in West Orange, NJ.

Success Requires ‘Keen Ability to Stop and Listen to Clients’ Needs and Objectives,’ Chiesa Firm’s Real Estate Group Says

“There is a misconception in certain circles that attorneys are technicians who provide a commodity service. We have made it our mission at CSG to counter that fallacy by assembling a team of savvy attorneys who understand our clients’ business goals and who apply a holistic approach to rendering legal advice.”

The real estate, development and land use group at Chiesa Shalinian & Giantomasi is a Law Journal Dealmakers winner. The below responses (provided by practice group chair Mitchell S. Berkey, and co-practice group leaders Gemma M. Giantomasi and Jeffrey M. Gussoff) were lightly edited for style and clarity.

What are some of your most satisfying successes of 2020, and why?

Dealmakers are extraordinarily busy people. What must firms do to ensure that they remain engaged with pro bono work, their communities and their families?

Even in a pandemic year that saw many deal-making groups cut back, our clients have continued to entrust and expand their business with CSG’s Real Estate Group to the extent that its headcount has proportionally grown since Summer 2020. We have successfully attracted and onboarded six new attorneys from the associate to member levels – including the incredible talents of the regionally renowned transactional real estate attorney, Philip A. Markowitz; Adelina Sklyar, a real estate finance attorney attracted from a prominent New York City firm; and Aileen Brennan, who joined from a boutique New Jersey-based land use firm – to stay ahead of the needs of our owner, developer, investor, lender and space user clients as they reimagine their short and long-term goals in this climate.

This remarkable growth has been critical in sustaining the pace of our clients’ success, which is how we ultimately gauge our own achievements, and we have been truly privileged and gratified to be involved in marquee projects over the course of 2020, which have included:

- Serving as counsel to the designated developer of the Montclair Arts & Entertainment District in its \$135 million, 3.5-acre mixed-use development set to energize the City’s vibrant cultural, dining and shopping downtown area.
- Representing the developer of a first-of-its-kind food waste recycling facility in Linden. The \$210 million Brownfield investment will result in one of the State’s largest carbon reduction resources and stand as a harbinger for the future of energy supply in New Jersey.
- Leading the deal team that secured a \$72 million construction loan to finance the development of what is targeted to be the world’s tallest modular hotel project.

While only representative in scope, these projects are illustrative of the types of results our tight-knit team helps drive for clients.

How have COVID-19 and other economic factors affected your practice area?

After an initial period of uncertainty following the onset of the pandemic in March, we saw an upward trend across our deal-

making subpractices – which include acquisitions and sales, lending, development and leasing. For several of our transactional clients, the pandemic created opportunities as they found properties to buy at advantageous prices. This has continued throughout the year, and borrower-side financings have accelerated at a rapid pace. Our landlord and tenant clients initially kept us busy with workouts, but that soon transitioned back into conventional leasing activity, which shows no signs of slowing down. Financing work for our lender clients has been a combination of loan modifications and new loans of all sizes, with an incredible year-end push by our lending clients to close loans in their respective pipelines. It’s no wonder we added so many new attorneys.

Amid a changing market for legal services, what does it take to become a trusted transactional lawyer in New Jersey?

“Trusted” being the operative keyword, it takes a keen ability to stop and listen to clients’ needs and objectives, as well as gain a meaningful understanding of the factors underlying their business operations. There is a misconception in certain circles that attorneys are technicians who provide a commodity service. We have made it our mission at CSG to counter that fallacy by assembling a team of savvy attorneys who understand our clients’ business goals and who apply a holistic approach to rendering legal advice. By developing and attracting well-rounded practitioners who insightfully dive deep below the surface, we not only counter that misconception but reinforce just the opposite – that we are strategic team members who our clients can count on at every stage.

Dealmakers are extraordinarily busy people. What must firms do to ensure that they remain engaged with pro bono work, their communities and their families?

While managing transactions with a high-touch, strategic approach can be incredibly demanding, the tone and direction set at the highest levels of leadership at CSG – paired with the deep sense of teamwork and the commitment we have all made to each other – ensures that our attorneys’ work demands are never in competition with the serious responsibilities of community service and managing family needs.

Because of this long-standing and deeply embedded “team” culture, our dealmakers, along with the entirety of the CSG family, are empowered with the flexibility and bandwidth to take on prominent roles within the greater community and currently serve in upmost leadership positions with a number of terrific organizations – including Volunteer Lawyers for Justice, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, Opportunity Project, the Urban Land Institute and the Newark Regional Business Partnership, to name a few.