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PRACTICES

## Spreading the Wealth

Meyer Unkovic's Real Estate Group Finding Success in Pa. and Beyond

By Ben Seal  
Of the Legal Staff

**M**eyer, Unkovic & Scott has been a reliable part of the real estate scene in Pittsburgh and around the state for a while now. The firm is commonly attached to some of the biggest development deals, office leases and mixed-use projects in Western Pennsylvania.

As the real estate market continues to improve, the practice group is seeing its work expand to areas beyond its usual reach, opening new doors and creating opportunities for entry into new markets. It all adds up to an impressive roster of work over the past two years and optimism that the hits will keep coming.

In large part because of its inclusion in Meritas, a non-profit, global organization of law firms with entrants in more than 80 countries,

Meyer Unkovic is able to work on matters it might not have access to without the connections the group provides. Members of Meritas refer clients to fellow firms, and Meyer Unkovic is the entrant for Pittsburgh. Stradley Ronon Stevens & Young is the Philadelphia entrant, said W. Grant Scott II, chair of Meyer Unkovic's real estate and lending group.

"It's really enabled us to practice nationwide and even worldwide without having the built-in infrastructure," Scott said. "While we might have lawyers admitted in West Virginia, Ohio, Florida and Georgia, when we have to write an opinion letter, we'll rely on our Meritas affiliate."

The affiliation has allowed Scott to close deals in places like Muncie, Indiana; Waterloo, Iowa; Carbondale, Illinois; and Crystal River, Florida, he said, all because he can represent Western Pennsylvania clients in deals they do elsewhere.

But it's not just through Meritas that the firm has extended its reach. It recently represented Huntington National Bank in its capacity as administrative agent in a \$62 million first mortgage loan to fund land and development rights for a luxury condominium in New York City's Upper East Side. The 225,000-square-foot tower will be anchored by 54,000 square feet of retail space.

Meyer Unkovic ended up involved in that deal because the developer was familiar with the firm's work and directed Huntington its way. Scott said it's no coincidence that the firm is being recognized beyond its usual roster of clients.

It comes down to the firm's philosophy of "training folks well and giving them good, meaty work," Scott said. "Once they figure out how to do the work, then figure out how you can think like a developer."

That approach, combined with the firm billing at rates lower than many competitors, allows Meyer Unkovic to add value for the client, Scott said. And if the past couple of years of work are any indication, clients are responding.

The firm's continued work on the McCandless Crossing mixed-use project is as clear an example of the firm's strengths as any of its numerous recent matters. The 130-acre space just north of Pittsburgh kept Meyer Unkovic's lawyers busy over the past two years. HomeGoods, Dick's Sporting Goods, Panera Bread Co. and Trader Joe's

were among the many retail outlets that signed leases for the site, and the developer sold space for a 12-screen movie theater and nearly five acres of residential property.

"McCandless Crossing has really provided us the ability to show off every facet of what we do here," Scott said. "From acquisition to land use approvals to construction contracting to leasing with big-box retailers. We've had outparcel sales. We've had construction issues. You name it. It's enabled us to show off our depth and breadth of practice."

Later this year, a mixed-use complex adjacent to Pittsburgh's downtown Market Square will open, featuring an 18-floor office tower, a 198-room Hilton hotel and a 330-space parking garage, as well as retail space and at least two restaurants. Meyer Unkovic attorneys represented Millcraft Investments Inc. in the \$105 million development, a relationship that started because Scott and Millcraft general counsel Timothy Hazel had worked on deals in the past before Hazel went in-house, Scott said.

The Millcraft matter is an example of how the firm approaches client relationships. Good work begets more work, keeping the firm a step ahead of many competitors.

"We listen to what the client wants. We're strategic with them," Scott said. "You have to be aligned." •

— FINALIST —  
REAL ESTATE

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