

LAW FIRM OF THE YEAR FINALIST

Pashman Stein: ‘Reject the Idea That Expertise in One Area Distinguishes a Firm From the Crowd’

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By ALM Staff

Pashman Stein Walder Hayden is a Law Journal Law Firm of the Year finalist. The below responses, provided by Michael S. Stein, managing partner, were lightly edited for style and clarity.

How did your firm achieve excellence across practices, and in varying ways, in 2020?

With among the deepest litigation benches in our region, what is most notable about our year, I think, is that we made a difference and had an impact—from the historic class action settlement involving prisoners’ phone charges, to complicated disputes amongst family business owners. And then, of course, there is the work that we did through



Michael S. Stein

the Justice Gary S. Stein Public Interest Center. I have always believed that as lawyers, we have a heightened responsibility to use our resources to serve the public good. The challenges of 2020 undoubtedly heightened public awareness of the need for social, racial, and economic

justice. I appreciate our partner organizations’ energy in working with the Stein Center. We were involved in 27 cases before the New Jersey Supreme Court in 2020—that’s a lot by any standard—including participating in eight oral arguments on important issues our state is

Courtesy photo

facing. With one full year behind us, we are beyond thrilled with how the Stein Center fits in with our goal, which is nothing short of being the “gold standard” of what a law firm can and should be.

The world has changed in the last year, including the impact of the coronavirus pandemic. What has your firm done to adapt?

Our firm’s adaptation to the pandemic truly had its foundation in our culture. While we modified technology and created policies to protect employees and serve clients, I believe that our culture firmwide had the greatest impact on our operations and success. From day one we were determined to get through this crisis together, and to ensure that every single employee would be proud to work at our firm. We did not furlough or reduce anyone’s pay. We expressed understanding if work levels ebbed and flowed, and we followed through with our commitment to stand by our

employees. We wanted every one of our employees to be able to say, at the end of this, that Pashman Stein is a great place to work in times of crisis. I am gratified that our approach generated positive energy internally and externally.

We also grew dramatically during this timeframe, which signals to me that the firm’s philosophy, and its commitment to the integrity of the institution, is well regarded.

In a market where both specialization and breadth of services are valued, how do law firms consistently achieve general excellence in New Jersey?

Excellence begins and ends with what is the most important asset in every single firm—and that is its people and the culture. Court victories and landmark decisions undoubtedly factor into the perception of our firm, but it is the people doing the work who collectively pursue excellence. We have worked very hard to create the kind of environment

and culture that enables us to attract and retain the best talent this region has to offer, people who are proud to go the extra mile and dig in and sweat for their clients. In terms of specialization, I reject the idea that expertise in one area distinguishes a firm from the crowd. Certainly, expertise is needed in a wide variety of areas, but it is character, passion and desire that we think count most. To be clear, we believe that our commitment to excellence is grounded in the knowledge that there is a real purpose to what we are doing. That in turn, we think, moves us closer to our primary objective for all of our employees, which is that the fulfilment that comes with being part of something important—something that can make a difference—leaves them with the same spring in their step on Monday morning with colleagues and clients that they have when they are winding down on Friday night with family and friends.