

Florida Law Firms Find Ways to Close Deals on Time Despite Irma

by **Monika Gonzalez Mesa**

As Hurricane Irma barreled its way toward Florida, firms with pending, time-sensitive transactions that were due around the time of the storm's landfall scrambled to meet deadlines.

For most lawyers, that meant evacuating to areas where they would have reliable power and internet connections. Large firms leveraged a wide footprint and enlisted lawyers based in other states to help with pending work. At some firms, attorneys who did not evacuate used mobile Wi-Fi devices that allowed them to work even when cell and data services were down.

"We had three transactions that happened around the hurricane—one was a business transaction for \$600,000 and the other two were real



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estate closings," said Frederick O'Malley, chief operating officer at Shutts & Bowen, who reviewed documents sent to him at his home in Southwest Ranches when he was on backup power and backup internet provided by a mobile Wi-Fi device.

O'Malley had lost his cell and data service due to the

storm, but the Verizon MiFi device allowed him to continue working. A MiFi device is essentially a cellphone hotspot without the cellphone.

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storm to negotiate a lease for a national restaurant chain.

“They were negotiating a lease for a new location and we had to make some key decisions with a pending deadline on the Tuesday after the storm,” Meyer said. “We did not have cellular service in my neighborhood until Thursday or Friday. However, with the SAT phone I was able to ask for and obtain an extension of the deadline from the landlord’s counsel.”

Meyer originally bought the satellite phone for safety when boating offshore and in the Bahamas, but it has turned out to be helpful under a few occasions, he said.

As Hurricane Irma was heading to South Florida, Greenberg Traurig attorneys were in the midst of more than half a dozen deals for various corporate and real estate clients. Closings were due to take place just before or after the storm was expected to hit the region.

As one team of Fort Lauderdale lawyers raced to soft close two pending acquisitions before the storm so that they could spend time preparing

their homes, another team was in the midst of closing an offering scheduled for the Monday following the storm. Greenberg Traurig Fort Lauderdale corporate shareholders Brian J. Gavsie and Flora R. Perez were closing a \$475 million public secondary offering of Nomad Foods Limited ordinary shares scheduled for Monday, Sept. 11.

“When it became clear that the closing was likely to occur after the storm, we began to involve attorneys from our New York office in the event that one or more members of our Fort Lauderdale team lost power, internet and/or was unable to communicate with the rest of the deal team over the weekend or on Monday,” Gavsie said.

Another Greenberg Traurig team, led by Fort Lauderdale corporate shareholders David Peck and Reggie Zachariah, essentially closed three transactions on Tuesday, Sept. 12—when much of South Florida was still in the dark. New York-based CommonView Capital was investing in Pain Specialists of America LLC to provide practice management services to Pain Specialists of Austin

and Central Texas Pain Center. The team also helped close Pain Specialists of America’s \$30 million credit facility.

Achieving the deals within the desired timeframe meant coordinating efforts of attorneys in South Florida, Boston, Dallas and Tallahassee. Zachariah worked from home Thursday and Friday until evacuating to his mother’s house, but after losing power late Saturday, he read documents on his phone while speaking to attorneys revising them in Boston. Fort Lauderdale attorneys worked on the deal as some evacuated to Las Vegas and Philadelphia.

“We involved additional attorneys in other cities as the storm approached, so the client would have seamless representation should Florida attorneys be unavailable,” Peck said. “The Fort Lauderdale team didn’t stop. Attorneys consistently logged in remotely to work on the deals whenever they reached hotel rooms, as far away as Asheville, North Carolina.”

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