

MVP: Gibson Dunn's Andrew Lance

By Joyce Hanson

Law360 (October 26, 2020, 4:38 PM EDT) -- Andrew Lance led a Gibson Dunn & Crutcher LLP team that advised a joint venture on a \$1.3 billion new arena for the New York Islanders NHL team and related redevelopment of Belmont Park on Long Island, landing him a place among Law360's 2020 Hospitality MVPs.

HIS BIGGEST ACCOMPLISHMENT THIS YEAR:

Lance is advising New York Belmont Partners and New York Arena Partners on their joint venture that has taken on the redevelopment of surplus land to bring the new UBS Arena to Long Island, along with a 350,000-square-foot retail shopping center and entertainment complex as well as a new hotel.

The New York-based Gibson Dunn partner, who serves as head of the real estate group's hotel and hospitality practice, guided the joint venture in negotiating and developing a master lease from Empire State Development signed Nov. 7 and a sublease signed Dec. 20 for the new hockey arena.

He called the entirely privately funded \$1.3 billion project "a tremendous accomplishment" in light of the complexity that his team faced while negotiating with state agencies and the lender community to develop a legal structure that would work for all parties involved. The law firm also faced legal challenges brought by local civic groups, which the state court dismissed in full as it adopted most of the arguments made by New York Arena Partners.

"This is one of the first privately financed sports arenas in the country in a very long time," Lance said. "So at a time of concern about the use of public resources, this structure is successful not only for the New York Islanders, but it's also likely to become a model for other sports arenas around the country. Our firm is now working on various phases of six different professional sports arenas around the country."

Lance noted that the project is a bright spot for the NHL team during the uncertainty of the COVID-19 pandemic and the Islanders' search for a new arena after the team played in Brooklyn for several years.



"It's a great project from a real estate perspective and from the perspective of community revitalization," Lance said. "The biggest part is the emotional connection that the extraordinary fan base has for this team. I continually run into people who are thrilled that the team is returning to a permanent home in Long Island. The building of the arena happens to coincide with a public health crisis, and it's going to model how we can all start to return to normal events and do it in a safe way."

OTHER NOTABLE TRANSACTIONS:

Lance served as lead real estate counsel for the seller in what Law360 reported to be last year's largest hospitality deal, with a price tag of \$5.8 billion, when Chinese-owned Anbang Insurance Group Co. sold Strategic Hotels & Resorts in September 2019 to South Korea's Mirae Asset Global Investments.

Strategic's portfolio of 15 luxury hotels and resorts across the U.S. included several Four Seasons hotels, the JW Marriott Essex House on Central Park South in New York, several Ritz-Carlton properties including those in Half Moon Bay near Silicon Valley, the Intercontinental in Chicago, the Fairmont Scottsdale in Arizona and the Westin in San Francisco.

More recently, Mirae failed to close the purchase in April 2020, as the COVID-19 pandemic set in. Lance and a team of Gibson Dunn litigators have led a lawsuit in Delaware on behalf of the seller against the buyer.

Even amid the crisis, Lance said, his practice group has continued to do a lot of work on purchases, sales and refinancings of hotel properties and rebranding of resort properties. For example, they recently represented Ohana Real Estate Investors in its purchase and financing of the Monarch Beach Resort in Dana Point, California, and rebranding with Hilton's Waldorf Astoria Hotels & Resorts luxury brand.

"The transaction was exciting not only in and of itself but also in demonstrating that even in the current climate, hotel properties have enduring value and are recognized as having a continuing attraction for people," Lance said. "That's part of what can give lenders, owners, employees and everybody else associated with hospitality confidence in the eventual recovery of the industry."

HIS BIGGEST CHALLENGE THIS YEAR:

Because the hospitality industry has been hit hard by the pandemic, Lance said his practice group has been swamped with client calls requesting legal help on debt forbearance agreements and other matters, as hotels and other venues look to shore up their businesses.

"We are as consumed seven days a week as we've ever been with work. It's an enormous flood," Lance said. "For many months, the bulk of that work has involved clients in crisis and clients dealing with unprecedented problems. So that is daunting and draining, but also exciting and challenging to find a way to alleviate the stress and get to a point that is a tolerable resolution for all sides to transactions. And in many of our transactions, there are not just two sides, there are four or five or six stakeholders."

WHAT MOTIVATES HIM:

Currently, Lance's greatest motivator is helping with recovery in the hospitality sector and elsewhere in the real estate market.

"Real estate is an enormous industry and an enormous source of jobs and capital," he said. "We have to find ways to deploy capital that's financially successful and that achieves the public good of resurgence from the crisis. How you marry those two things is critical both for our clients' success in the particular

transaction in front of us and also for our clients' success in the broader economy."

— *As told to Joyce Hanson*

Law360's MVPs are attorneys who have distinguished themselves from their peers over the past year through high-stakes litigation, record-breaking deals and complex global matters. A team of Law360 editors selected the 2020 MVP winners after reviewing more than 900 submissions.