

Private Equity Group Of The Year: Gibson Dunn

By **Andrew McIntyre**

Law360, Minneapolis (January 27, 2016, 5:31 PM ET) -- Long established as a major law firm player in the private equity space, Gibson Dunn worked on a pair of billion-dollar deals for Lone Star Funds this past year as the firm continued grabbing work on some of 2015's largest private equity matters and secured a place among Law360's Private Equity Groups of the Year.



Gibson Dunn represented Lone Star last summer when it took multifamily real estate investment trust Home Properties Inc. private in a deal worth \$7.6 billion, and also helped the Texas PE shop with its recent, \$1.4 billion purchase of Hanson Building Products Ltd. from HeidelbergCement AG.

Thanks in part to its relationship with the Dallas-based PE firm, Gibson Dunn has come to have a significant private equity practice in the city.

"Lone Star has been a real hit for us. That client is really serviced primarily out the Dallas office," Sean P. Griffiths, co-chair of Gibson Dunn's private equity group, told Law360 in a recent interview, regarding the \$7.6 billion deal.

"Private equity has been a focus of ours really from the mid-1980s. We've grown up with private equity. That has really spawned a lot of relationships," Griffiths said.

The firm represents a broad range of sovereign wealth funds and financial sponsors and institutions, and does work on both fund formation and the execution of deals.

The firm's largest private equity presence is in New York, but Gibson Dunn also has strong practices in Los Angeles, the San Francisco Bay Area, Dallas and London, with a smaller private equity group in D.C.

"There's ... a strong presence in London," Griffiths said. "We've moved very boldly in London. Picked up some private equity experts to augment our team there. We've got a really strong team in Europe now."

Griffiths said what sets Gibson Dunn's private equity group from other firms' is expertise in a range of areas outside private equity and PE partners who are heavily involved in other corporate matters.

Gibson Dunn has roughly 200 lawyers in its private equity group.

"The value that we add, from a private equity perspective, to our clients ... is the ability ... to bring substantive expertise from all the ancillary areas," Griffiths said. "Tax, ERISA, real estate, benefits, environmental."

"What differentiates us is our people are actively involved in those substantive areas working for our corporate clients as opposed to just sitting around and waiting for the private equity people to call. If the target company has an FCPA issue, we have a phenomenal FCPA group. We bring in those people," he continued. "That is a different level of expertise."

While Lone Star has provided a steady source of work to the firm, it prides itself on representing a wide range of clients and doing deals that dip into various sectors.

For one, late last year the firm worked on a pair of retail-related deals.

Gibson Dunn represented CVC Capital Partners Ltd. and the Canada Pension Plan Investment Board in their acquisition of Petco Animal Supplies Inc. in a \$4.6 billion enterprise deal. The firm also counseled Sleepy's LLC in its \$780 million sale to Mattress Firm, a J.W. Childs Associates LP portfolio company.

"Those are two large retail deals, each with more than 1,000 locations, and both private equity-related," Griffiths said.

Meanwhile, Gibson Dunn helped J.H. Whitney & Co. LLC sell TIDI Products LLC last summer to Roundtable Healthcare Partners LP, and represented background check company SterlingBackcheck, a Calera Capital Advisors LP portfolio company, in its majority interest sale last summer to Goldman Sachs Group Inc. and Caisse de depot et placement du Quebec.

The latter deal, Griffiths said, was a "very hot transaction with a very active group of bidders."

"We run the gamut. We represent the CVCs and the Lone Stars of the world, but also do a lot of middle-market work," he said. "It's always been a principal focus area for growth for us. It's a practice that the firm has grown up with. Something that's very well-known within the firm. People know how to work on a private equity transactions."

Looking ahead, the firm expects another strong year for private equity and will continue its aim of forging new client relationships and perhaps even further growing the PE group's ranks.

"In 2016 I think we'll continue to look to grow the private equity practice, both in terms of clients and potentially lateral partners," Griffiths said. "We expect that 2016 will be a strong private equity and M&A year as people sort of digest a lot of the acquisitions from last year and decide to sell off things that are unwanted or don't fit the profile."

"We're very bullish," he noted.

--Additional reporting by Benjamin Horney, Kurt Orzeck and Kali Hays. Editing by Edrienne Su.
