



# Payton & Associates, LLC

By Rebecca Larsen

**F**or Harry Payton, the mission statement on his law firm's website is a promise to clients. It reads: "We are a trial firm committed to the practice of law, to serving our clients efficiently and effectively, and to serving our community." As Payton explains, "It is our value statement. This is our culture. This is what we are all about."

Payton & Associates of Miami, a boutique firm of four attorneys, concentrates on complex commercial litigation, including commercial real estate litigation, commercial foreclosure litigation, lender liability, shareholder, partnership and contract disputes, probate and estate litigation, professional liability, and appellate law. The firm's expertise, representing decades of experience, is ideally suited to handling the difficulties facing many businesses in today's economy as well as those arising in times of growth and expansion.

But attorneys at the firm offer personal care and service that is often rare in today's legal world. "We try to make every client feel as if he or she is the only client we serve," Payton said. "When we confer with clients, they have our total, undivided attention. This is a service business, and we are very client-oriented. When clients call, we are here; we answer the phone. There's no bureaucracy, and the client is not talking to an intermediary. A client can reach an attorney and get a response." All of the attorneys are senior level, and an experienced attorney works on every case.

Sam Heller, an attorney and mediator in Florida who first met Payton when they were opposing each other in federal court, confirms Payton's devotion to clients. "He combines extreme competence, coupled with fierce commitment to his clients," said Heller. "And Harry is one of the best commercial trial lawyers in this part of the country."

A South Florida resident, Payton founded his firm a few years after graduating from Georgetown University Law Center. Since its founding, the firm has represented successful individuals, businesses and government agencies throughout the state of Florida, as well as clients outside of Florida and abroad. The firm has a strong presence throughout the state, including Tampa and

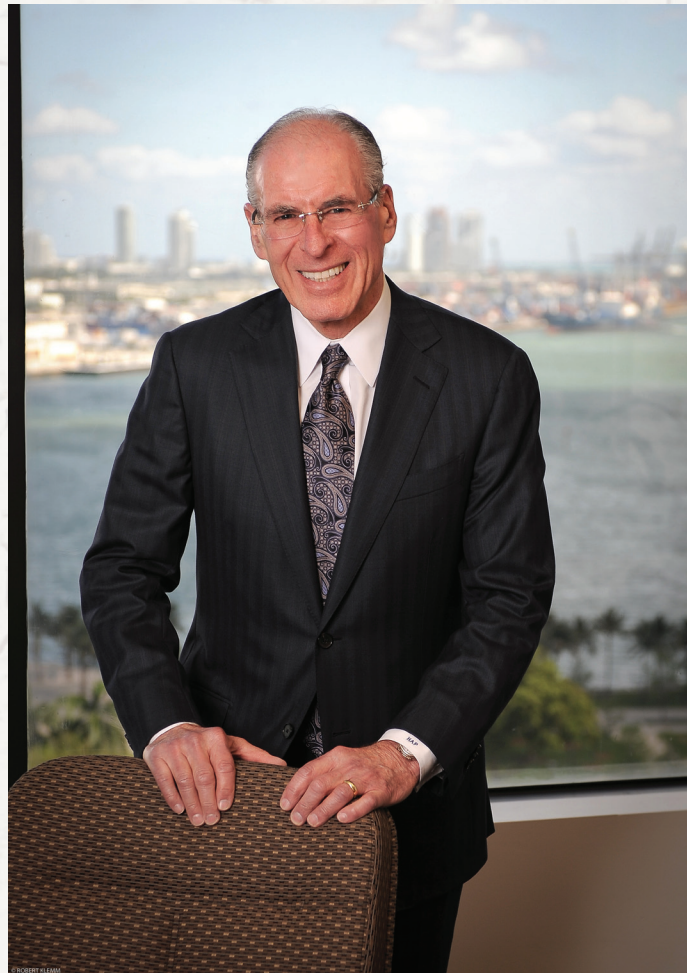


Photo by Robert Klamm Photography

Orlando, as well as its home base in Miami.

Payton is a member of the International Network of Boutique Law Firms (INBLF), a group of vetted, national and international law firms that provide a high level of service and experience to clients. The INBLF has affiliates throughout the U.S., and a strong presence globally, including Asia, Africa, Australia, Central America, Europe, and South America. Currently, Payton is working on a matter involving a Chinese contract while using a Hong Kong affiliate of the INBLF. "Through membership in the INBLF, our firm can provide a client with many of the benefits of a national or international law firm, while still providing personal attention to the client's needs."

Payton & Associates handles many cases for builders and developers involving lender liability and commercial foreclosures. Typical is the plight of a client building an office complex. The lender failed to pay the last construction draw without any explanation, though the building was over 98% complete and the draw had been approved. “The lender ceased funding and never explained why. Four months later, the lender foreclosed claiming that the builder was in default,” Payton said. “In cases like these, the lender deserves to be sued and made to pay for the damages it causes the developer.”

Besides his devotion to his practice, Payton is committed to helping improve professionalism in the legal community. The Florida Supreme Court launched the board certification program in 1982 to help consumers identify specialists in various areas of the law. Board certification is the highest level of evaluation by the Florida Bar that recognizes attorneys’ special knowledge, skill and proficiency; and professionalism and ethics in practice. Board certified attorneys are the only Florida attorneys allowed to identify themselves as “Board Certified,” “Specialist,” or “Expert.” Payton has always been strongly committed to the program and spent 10 years serving on committees because of that interest. In particular, he chaired the Business Litigation Certification Committee that screens applicants and prepares and grades exams for attorneys seeking business litigation certification. Later, he chaired the Board of Legal Specialization and Education (BLSE), the committee that supervises the entire certification program. “The goal is to make it easier for the public to select lawyers with knowledge and expertise,” he said. Only 7% of Florida Bar members, approximately 4,500 lawyers, are board certified; and Payton is one of only 100 attorneys in Florida with bar certification in two areas: civil trial and business litigation.

In 2012, Payton was appointed by the Honorable Joel H. Brown, Chief Judge of the Eleventh Judicial Circuit Court, to be a member of the Supreme Court of Florida’s Commission on Professionalism. He is leading an effort to develop a mentoring program for young attorneys in the Eleventh Circuit, and seeks to utilize board certified attorneys for the program. Some 40 board certified lawyers have signed on to serve as mentors. “Young

attorneys need to know that they can be assertive and aggressive in litigation and still maintain professionalism,” he said.

Payton is highly regarded by his peers. He has consistently received the highest rating of AV Preeminent in Martindale-Hubbell® PEER REVIEW RATINGS™, an indicator of a lawyer’s high ethical standards and professional ability. He has been listed in the South Florida Legal Guide since 2005 as a Top Lawyer in complex commercial litigation and real estate litigation. He has also been included in the list of Florida Super Lawyers® in business litigation since 2006. He currently serves on the Florida Bar Judicial Nominating Procedures Committee, and is an active member of the American Bar Association Corporate Counsel Committee, Section of Litigation. He was a leader in the effort by the ABA Corporate Counsel Committee in the creation of a uniform system of billing and budgeting that serves as a platform for assessing the productivity and efficiency of outside counsel and law firms. He seeks to improve the way in which in-house counsel and corporate law departments manage their business litigation through his active role in the Law Department Consortium.

Above all in his practice, Payton & Associates is results-oriented. “We are here to achieve results for a client,” Payton said. “Filing a lawsuit doesn’t always meet the client’s objectives. Some clients want to find a quick way out of a situation; some want to pursue a suit to maintain a principle. There are all sorts of approaches, and we are sensitive to that. And if we go to court, we go to win.”

#### **CONTACT INFORMATION:**

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