



Thoughtful design

Work behind the scenes helps address concerns regarding development

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What is the strategy to ensure that Tampa's growth is balanced and carried out responsibly?

Development for development's sake is not necessarily good development. When someone comes to me with a project, I always tell them, "I understand what you want to do but this project may look different when it's approved than it looks today." Part of what we do on the land development team on behalf of our clients is to work with staff and the community to try to address the concerns of all those sectors. We will never make everyone happy but we do a lot of work behind the scenes to present thoughtfully designed projects to the Tampa Bay City Council. We see this as our responsibility.

Where do you see the greatest opportunities for impact of the firm's Equity and Justice program?

We launched the Equity and Justice program in 2020. At first, our efforts were focused internally, as it was important to provide information to those who wanted it. Our goal was to create a space for people to have their voices heard, connect with, and learn from each other. The program addresses a range of important topics affecting our communities with a focus on timely news and events. We also have a Diversity Committee dedicated to maintaining a diverse, inclusive, and collaborative work environment across our firm's five offices with an emphasis on professional development, recruitment and retention, education, and community. Diversity and inclusion start with education, and we provide the opportunity. We are continuously growing together.

From an external perspective, the legal markets traditionally have not been very diverse. As a firm, we have done significant work on this over the past few

years, and we are doing much better than many firms, but we still have a long way to go. To help ensure the next generation of lawyers is diverse, we actively work with local law schools to recruit attorneys from a wide range of backgrounds for our law clerk programs. The firm is also spearheading a Bridge to Law School program that provides first-generation law students with the knowledge, advice, and support they need to successfully navigate law school and develop a fulfilling and meaningful legal career.

How do you provide a culture that makes talent want to come in and remain with the firm?

I came to the firm about five years ago from another big law firm. I quickly realized that the culture is uniquely supportive, which fosters collaboration and allows us to service clients in a different way than other law firms. Our main focus is on providing the best service and legal work for our clients. We evaluate attorneys based on the quality of their legal work, maintenance of client relationships (rather than origination) and leadership both internally and in the broader community. This provides our clients access to the diverse experiences and perspectives of our attorneys and ensures the right person is working on the task to yield comprehensive, results-driven legal advice. We also prioritize mentorship and professional development. New lawyers routinely work on challenging projects, side-by-side with seasoned lawyers, often across disciplines. The supportive culture we have at Stearns Weaver is reflected in the longevity of our employees. Over 35% of all attorneys and staff statewide have been with the firm for 15+ years. ■