

Coming Home: Armstrong Teasdale's Focus on Philadelphia

When attorney Richard Scheff joined Armstrong Teasdale in 2018, he had high expectations for the future of the firm on the East Coast. A Newark, New Jersey, native, growing up in the shadows of the city that never sleeps, Scheff has long subscribed to the motto that without hard work, nothing grows but weeds.

A former federal prosecutor, Scheff also has a storied, 30-plus-year career in white-collar criminal defense, and has built a deep bench on the East Coast in recent years, aligned with the firm's strategic goals.

While the opportunities that have come to bear in the past two and a half years may seem lofty, they are nothing short of ordinary to Scheff. "The sky is truly the limit," he says. "There's not much that can hold us back, but we need to continue to be smart about the opportunities we choose to be more competitive globally."

The Am Law 200 firm has added eight new offices in that time frame – largely on the East Coast, including Boston, New York and Wilmington – under Scheff and Managing Partner David Braswell's leadership. The firm's most recent venture, however, is transatlantic, having landed in London in February 2021, increasing the firm to over 640 lawyers and staff professionals.

Scheff, who has run for years on far less sleep than many, seems to work at the same speed as the firm is expanding.

As the legal industry becomes increasingly competitive, and talent "wars" pick up in light of those displaced by COVID-19, Scheff says he is turning his sights back to Philadelphia. Today, leading strategic growth on the East Coast for the firm as Partner and Leader – Eastern U.S., Scheff is keen on making Armstrong Teasdale a major player in his current hometown.

Why invest in Philadelphia now? Is the firm slowing down on new market growth?

I'm not sure slowing down is in our vocabulary right now. As a firm, we're taking a strategic approach to growth while at the same time being ambitious and aggressive.

Philadelphia is a really incredible place – it's a city with a lot of

love, and a lot of grit – and that combination makes it, in my mind, the perfect place to grow a career. It's location near New York and Washington, and in the heart of the Amtrak corridor, makes it an ideal location to grow. When Armstrong Teasdale opened on the East Coast, it started with Philadelphia, and it's time to re-energize our focus in the market now that we have a significant foothold in the region and can better service clients doing business around the world.



Richard L. Scheff, Partner and Leader – Eastern U.S.

A lot of firms have had to make really tough decisions in the past year. They're under pressure. We were fortunate to be in a really strong position pre-pandemic and continue that growth despite what was a really taxing year for many. And that's not to say we were unaffected by it, but we had a plan.

Every piece of that plan matters. Philadelphia plays a significant role in the overall success of the firm. We have an incredibly strong Litigation practice, particularly in the area of white-collar, a burgeoning intellectual property practice, and room to grow in the market.

What do you think are some of the most significant legal challenges facing organizations today?

Given the global economy and changes related to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, many organizations are facing finance- and employment-related challenges. Similarly, with the change in administration, we're looking at new enforcement priorities from government agencies, as well as COVID-19-related fraud surfacing.

Fintech and digital currency, of course, are also rapidly growing and evolving, and businesses are trying to keep up.

There's a lot to get your arms around right now whether you're the CEO of a Fortune 100 company, or a small business owner.

What kind of talent are you looking to add that you think would set you apart in the market?

We're fortunate to have a lot of great legal talent in the region, and a lot of that stems from the handful of top law schools in close proximity. The city also attracts newcomers who see Philadelphia as the vibrant, livable city that it is, as well as those who went to school elsewhere but want to come home. We have a really diverse team in Philadelphia, and finding the right talent is critical. Right from a skills perspective, and right from a cultural perspective. Someone adaptive and entrepreneurial. I would certainly like to further round out our service offerings, especially as we look at corporate and employment law.

The trends we've been seeing related to globalization and mergers have been further accelerated by COVID-19, and we will continue to look for opportunities that make sense for us, and our clients, in Philadelphia and beyond.



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