

Miami Firms Gift \$1M In Hopes Of Creating Class Action Hub

By Carolina Bolado

Law360, Miami -- Three Miami trial and class action law firms have made a \$1 million gift to the University of Miami School of Law to support scholarships and fund an annual forum on class action law that the attorneys hope will help make South Florida a hub for complex mass actions and multidistrict litigation.

[Kozyak Tropin & Throckmorton PA](#), [Podhurst Orseck PA](#) and Harke Clasby & Bushman LLP have joined to make the gift that will fund an annual forum set to debut in December. They hope it will become the premier conference on the subject of class action litigation.

"I've traveled and spoken at seminars and programs, but it's not the consistent academic study that we think is necessary," said Adam Moskowitz, chair of the class action practice at Kozyak Tropin. "There's really not that much out there other than just scrambling when there's a new case that makes the news. We want to have an opportunity to take a step back without all of the political frenzy."

The firms plan to bring together legal, political and academic leaders from around the country to help advance the study of class actions, according to Moskowitz.

And by scheduling the forum to coincide with the Art Basel art fair, the organizers hope to make the forum a "can't miss" event for class action attorneys on both the plaintiff and defense sides.

"It's a time of year when people really like to come to Miami not only because of the weather but also because Art Basel is a major cultural destination," said Patricia White, dean of the University of Miami Law School. "It makes coming to this conference even more attractive, and we're going to be offering some access to Art Basel for our guests that I think they will appreciate."

White said the law school already hosts the largest continuing education event in estate planning, the Heckerling Institute, which attracts more than 3,000 people. The event has become so popular that it had to be moved to Orlando because there was no hotel large enough in Miami to host it, according to White.

She hopes that the class action event will be just as successful and that practitioners around the country will eventually associate the school with excellence in class action, as they already do in the wealth management and estate planning realm.

The forum "should be the first of its kind," according to White. Duke University School of Law has a class action-focused conference and offers an LL.M. in class action and mass tort litigation, but this forum will complement the event at Duke, she said.

The Southern District of Florida has played host to a number of high-profile MDLs in recent years, including the ongoing litigation over checking account overdraft fees and the faulty Takata air bags. But attorneys say the area could support more.

“If you look at the statistics of how many cases have been assigned, it pales in comparison to other jurisdictions,” Moskowitz said.

The area boasts both a sophisticated legal community and federal judges who are not only skilled and well respected but also have a reputation for being efficient, according to Peter Prieto of Podhurst Orseck

“I think that every federal district has a theme or tradition, and for the judges down here in the Southern District of Florida it's of being efficient and moving their cases very quickly and effectively,” he said. “It's been like that for many years.”

In addition to the annual forum, the firms' \$1 million gift will help fund the law school's Miami Scholars program, which pays the tuition for incoming students who are committed to a career in public services. The gift will also fund a fellowship for a law student who has excelled in the area of multidistrict litigation.

“This scholarship will provide today's law students with novel resources to apply real-world thinking to tomorrow's most complex legal challenges while also helping to attract and retain the brightest minds in our community,” Podhurst Orseck managing partner Steven Marks said.

For Moskowitz, Prieto, Marks and many others at the three firms, the scholarships are a way to give back to their alma mater.

“We are forever grateful and overjoyed to be able to give back to an institution that has meant so much to us personally as well as this community and our region as a whole,” Lance Harke of Harke Clasby & Bushman said.