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ATTORNEY AT LAW

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2019 SUPERSTARS



2019 RISING STARS

ROY BLACK
LEGAL LEGEND

Goldberg
& Rosen, P.A
LAW FIRM OF THE MONTH

RAQUEL “ROCKY” RODRIGUEZ



PHOTO BY CHRIS BRIDGE

TRANSFORMING FLORIDA.

AALM: When did you first know you wanted to become an attorney?

Rodriguez: My mother first planted the thought and would share articles about local law firms. My father studied law in Cuba before he ran for and was elected to the Cuban House of Representatives. Serving as a juror in a mock trial and hearing Associate Dean of the Law School Alan Swan say, “If you like staying up late at night wrestling with ideas, the law is for you,” sealed it! I fell in love with the law and being a lawyer my first day of law school.

AALM: Do you have any mentors or professors who encouraged you?

Rodriguez: My parents were my first and greatest mentors. They taught me that with hard work and perseverance, I could accomplish anything. The word “can’t” was never in my vocabulary. The greatest lessons they taught me stemmed from the tragedy of having lost their homeland, Cuba, to communism and having to seek exile in the United States. They always reminded me that no one could take away your education or your reputation, even if they took all your worldly possessions. Their words of wisdom have served me in everything I have ever done.

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I also had amazing mentors throughout my education and career. At my first firm, Greenberg Traurig, I had the great fortune to know and work closely with the firm founders, Mel Greenberg, Bob Traurig and Larry Hoffman. They took a personal interest in the careers of the lawyers at the firm, including the associates. This culture of mentorship extended throughout the firm. Alan Dimond (former Florida Bar President) and Hilarie Bass (former ABA President) encouraged and supported me from my first volunteer position in the Dade County Bar Association Young Lawyers

Section through to my becoming Chair of the ABA Young Lawyers Division.

Another Greenberg partner, Sue Cobb (later US Ambassador to Jamaica), involved me in Republican politics, which eventually led to my role as one of the lead lawyers for George W. Bush in the 2000 Presidential Election Litigation and to serve as General Counsel to Governor Jeb Bush.

AALM: What first drew you to your firm? Tell us about your role there.

Rodriguez: I joined McDonald Hopkins in 2011 and founded the Miami office. I am the managing member of the Miami office and serve on the firm’s board of directors.

My friend and former partner from Greenberg days, John Metzger, heads our West Palm Beach office, and he was a big factor in my joining. McDonald Hopkins reminded me in many ways of Greenberg Traurig, when I joined in 1985. I liked its scale and entrepreneurial spirit. I saw these qualities in McDonald Hopkins as well, with 130 lawyers and six offices.

AALM: Thus far in your career, what are you most proud of accomplishing?

Rodriguez: My proudest accomplishment is my contribution to the state's life sciences sector. It started in 2003 when Governor Bush recruited The Scripps Research Institute to Florida. I conceived the structure for funding the Scripps project with \$350 million in state incentives – balancing Scripps' need for certainty while protecting tax dollars. After state government, I represented the foremost research institute in the world, the Max Planck Society, in securing over \$180 million in state and local incentives to establish its only research institute outside Europe – the Max Planck Florida Institute for Neuroscience. Scripps Florida and Max Planck Florida propelled Palm Beach County into a hub for scientific research. They've attracted Nobel Prize winning scientists and led to discoveries that have launched new companies and will cure diseases. Governor Bush had a vision that biotech would transform Florida's economy the way air conditioning had decades before. It's become my life's mission to make that vision reality.

AALM: How would you describe the culture of the firm?

Rodriguez: McDonald Hopkins is very entrepreneurial and collegial, with minimal bureaucracy. A firm-wide P&L encourages cross-selling and referring work across offices. Our culture emphasizes quality of life, understanding that lawyers are multidimensional people who have lives outside the practice of law. We also encourage lawyers to innovate and develop new practice areas. I have freedom to develop my practice without being pigeon-holed in any one area. The firm trusts me to figure out what resources I need. This way, I maintain a great practice mix of business litigation, government relations, election law and business counseling.

AALM: Tell us about your fellow attorneys at your firm. How do you work together?

Rodriguez: We are a full-service business advisory and advocacy law firm. Most of us are laterals, from firms of every size including some of the largest and most prestigious firms in the world. We think like clients – achieving goals and solving problems. Lawyers will get on a plane or jump on a call to help pitch a client or solve an issue, without concern for

origination credit. Working across offices is seamless to the client. Intangibles play a role in compensation. Lawyers think about the bigger picture, not just how much revenue they can generate for themselves. Our open compensation system eliminates the wasted energy in trying to figure out who got paid what and why. Every member has information on every financial aspect of our firm.

AALM: What case most defined or redefined your practice?

Rodriguez: The 2000 Presidential Election Litigation. You may not have seen my name in the press, but I was there from the first moments that led to the litigation, as Florida Co-Chair of Lawyers for Bush-Cheney. I left the elections office around 4 AM and was back the next morning before 8AM, when it seemed the whole world had descended. I was one of the three lead lawyers representing the GOP/Bush campaign in the Miami-Dade portion of the recount.

Becoming Governor Bush's general counsel completely transformed my practice. I worked on everything from judicial appointments to negotiating the largest economic development deal in state history at the time (Scripps Florida) to trying to save Terri Schiavo's life.

AALM: What is the one piece of advice you would give to a student or young attorney who would like to follow in your footsteps?

Rodriguez: Never take "no" for an answer. This means not just refusing to accept "no" from others but also not telling yourself "no" in terms of what you can accomplish. If my career has taught me anything it's that everything and anything is possible if you work hard and persevere. The law prepares you to do virtually everything, because it teaches you how to think and stand up for what you believe. It also means there's no "one way" to practice law. There are so many aspects to being a lawyer as well as using a law degree for many other endeavors. Take advantage of every opportunity. Use every experience to build for the next one. Give yourself permission to follow your passions or develop new ones. When I started, I had no idea that I'd end up in Tallahassee or representing presidential campaigns or life science companies. But I knew I wanted to build a "life that matters" (with a nod to the late Charles Krauthammer). I did not know exactly what path to take, so I just started out being the best lawyer and person I could be and the opportunities started coming my way.

MCDONALD HOPKINS LLC

200 South Biscayne Blvd., Suite 2600
Miami, FL 33131
(305) 704-3990
mcdonaldhopkins.com



**THE LAW
PREPARES
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