

As Seen In

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Farrell Fritz balances the beast and the east

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BRIDGEHAMPTON

— Sometime during 2002, Adam Miller got tired of making the long drive back to

Manhattan on Sunday night.

So when the real estate attorney landed a job in 2003 in the Bridgehampton office of Uniondale-based Farrell Fritz, he might have thought he was leaving his mega law firm in the city far behind. Turns out it wasn't that far behind because, for many of his clients, the space between Riverhead and the East River is kind of like a big flyover zone.

"What I find out here is that it's a suburb of New York City," Miller said. "It's almost two different worlds."

That could make things awkward for Farrell Fritz, a major player on Long Island but not known as well outside its home base. Miller acknowledged that the East End business, though becoming more prosperous, has been a marketing challenge as the firm balances the country and city.

Farrell Fritz entered the East End market five years ago, when it bought out the practice of Payne Wood Littlejohn. The firm believed that it could tap a deep well of clients by offering bigger-firm advantages in a land dominated by solo practitioners. Farrell Fritz's two offices in East Hampton and Bridgehampton function like small-town attorney shops, but the lawyers know that behind them is a small army of seasoned professionals.

"Farrell Fritz has an unbelievable reputation on Long Island, but the East End is a completely different world," Miller said. "But once people out here figure that out, they're impressed by the breadth of our practice. We see ourselves out here as a kind of conduit to other attorneys."



QUIGLEY DOWN UNDER: Law firm Farrell Fritz's eastern migration has been anything but quixotic, according to partner Theresa Quigley of the firm's East Hampton office.

Theresa Quigley, a Farrell Fritz partner in East Hampton, said most of their clients start out needing help with real estate transactions. But real-estate guidance can easily morph into environmental law, given the variety of shoreline and wetland regulations, and real estate is so valuable that buying property usually entails bringing in an estate planning specialist.

In fact, various partners routinely make trips out to the East End to meet with clients, Miller said, often with each day of the week dedicated to specific area of law — environment, estates, corporate, employment or litigation.

Still, the East End prides itself on its quaintness, which means that a large firm such as Farrell Fritz has to be delicate. Quigley said many clients are used to paying a flat rate for services on the East End, while Farrell's attorneys work

by the hour.

She compensates by drawing up contracts that set out an estimated flat rate, adding a clause that allows her to charge more if the work ends up taking more time than she expected. And sometimes, as in a recent real estate case that ran up \$10,000 in hourly billing, she doesn't charge the full amount, she said.

Farrell Fritz is also mindful in other ways of being a heavier hitter. It hasn't sought to dominate the market, and the firm has earned enough trust to be called in by locals to help out with more complex cases.

"We didn't want to come out here like gangbusters to steal all the business," said Miller, who has worked with local government panels and real estate boards. "We're still very sensitive to that." ■

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