

## New Jersey Powerhouse: Chiesa Shahinian

By **Kevin Penton**

*Law360 (August 21, 2023, 1:17 PM EDT)* -- Chiesa Shahinian & Giantomasi PC assisted several large clients as they did business in New Jersey over the past year, working on projects such as the redevelopment of a former military base into a media production facility and a former housing project into a film studio complex.

The Roseland-based firm also represented musical artist Lizzo in several trademark battles and PwC in an alleged breach of contract case that was tossed twice before the parties settled, landing it among Law360's 2023 New Jersey Powerhouses, the second consecutive year it has received the honor.

Chiesa Shahinian earlier this year moved into its new 120,000-square-foot headquarters in Roseland, on the heels of topping \$100 million in revenue in 2022, the first time it cracked nine figures, according to the firm.

Chiesa Shahinian is committed to its approximately 185 attorneys collaborating in person, albeit on a hybrid, three-times-a-week schedule, said Francis Giantomasi, a member of the law firm's executive committee and real estate, development and land use group.

While Chiesa Shahinian has attracted more than 25 attorneys over the past year, Giantomasi noted that in part because the firm is not sitting on a large amount of debt that it would otherwise need to repay, it can be strategic with its growth strategy, making additions only when an attorney or an office clearly fits into its overall culture.

"We don't feel pressure to have to grow just for the sake of growth, because we need more money," Giantomasi said. "We are growing ... when we find the right talent that can augment the teams that we have put in place."

Chiesa Shahinian in the past year assisted several clients with their own growth plans, such as Netflix's bid to construct a modern production facility on 292 acres at the former Fort Monmouth military base in Monmouth County. The firm served as lead counsel for Netflix in the deal, negotiating a redevelopment agreement for acquisition of the site.

Chiesa Shahinian also assisted the New Jersey Performing Arts Center as it looked to create a film studio



complex at a former public housing development in Newark. The firm successfully petitioned for the property to be designated an area in need of redevelopment, drew up a redevelopment deal with the Newark Housing Authority, worked on formulating regulations for using the site as a film studio, secured land use approvals, and is working on negotiating a long-term lease with a studio operator.

The firm also continues to represent the Triple Five Group as it develops and operates American Dream, the largest mall in New Jersey and the second largest in the country, behind only Minnesota's Mall of America, which the company also owns.

Chiesa Shahinian in February scored a precedential victory at the Trademark Trial and Appeal Board on behalf of pop singer Lizzo, who registered the term "100% That Bitch" — a line from her hit song "Truth Hurts" — as a trademark for clothing.

The TTAB reversed an examining attorney's determination that the phrase wouldn't work as a trademark because it was a widely used "commonplace expression" and an "ordinary, familiar, well-recognized sentiment," finding instead that much of the evidence introduced in the matter referenced Lizzo and her own music.

Chiesa Shahinian has also experienced a lot of growth with its cannabis law group, working with dozens of clients on their corporate, intellectual property, real estate, litigation and regulatory needs as the market in New Jersey expanded, first on the medical side and more recently on the recreational side, said Lee Vartan, the group's co-chair.

"We're really proud of the practice, in large measure because four to five years ago, it did not exist," he said. "It has been a real generator for the firm."

Marie Mathews, Chiesa Shahinian's practice group leader for litigation, said the firm has seen litigation successes, such as with PwC beating back the breach of contract claims and with Ameream — the American Dream mall's developer — defeating claims that it was responsible for making a payment on a consulting deal between the project's former owners and a contractor.

"The firm has the bench to take matters to trial and get resolution, but also the strategy and judgment that's required to settle things prior to trial," she said.

While other firms have struggled to return to the office following the COVID-19 pandemic, Chiesa Shahinian has bet on in-person work, not only with its new digs but also with how it has re-tailored the work experience, allowing lawyers to dress comfortably while also including wardrobes in offices should attorneys need to change, Giantomasi said.

"We make sure that people can dress for their day," he said. "And if their day means that they're at a computer all day in their office and they want to wear sneakers and jeans and a comfortable shirt, then we support that. Four years ago, that wouldn't have been the case."

--Editing by Linda Voorhis.