

## Liner LLP Adds Real Estate Tax Pro In SoCal

By Kyle Jahner

*Law360, Washington (February 22, 2017, 10:17 PM EST)* -- Liner LLP has brought aboard a heavyweight with decades of experience in structuring real estate transactions and a concentration in like-kind transactions for its Los Angeles office, along with two of his associates.

Warren “Skip” Kessler had run his own firm Kessler & Kessler in Los Angeles for about 30 years, specializing in so-called Section 1031 like-kind exchange matters before joining Liner on Feb. 13. He also brought tax attorney Michael Wiener and corporate and real estate specialist Emily Houpert with him to Liner.

Liner, with several lawyers familiar with Kessler and his work, snapped him up when he approached looking to bring his business into the firm. Afshin Beyzaee, a partner in Liner’s corporate & restructuring department who will work with Kessler, said he’s worked with Kessler on various deals and is excited.

“Adding Skip expands our ability to service our real estate clients looking to find creative solutions to tax issues they come across. The more horsepower we have here with Skip and his group will help us do that in an effective way,” Beyzaee told Law360. “I’ve worked with him on matters for many years now, so I know the level of expertise, diligence and creativity he has in this area.”

In Section 1031 exchanges, one asset is sold while another is bought in a similar time frame, and the deal is structured so the entity minimizes any tax burden from the sale.

This type of tax transaction became a big deal in the early 1990s when the IRS published some rules on the transaction, Kessler told Law360 on Wednesday. Then some 2000 IRS rules on reverse exchanges — in which the purchase of a new property closes before another is sold, to similar tax effect — “opened up the floodgates” for Kessler’s practice, which he said had done at least 1,000 such deals worth billions, including about 30 he’s working on now.

Kessler said his three-lawyer real estate practice had reached a point where it had to grow or meld into a compatible, bigger firm. He decided growing his own firm would add pressure he didn’t need. He said he sought a firm that had quality lawyers, a focus on tax and real estate, corporate support, regional basis — rather than a West Coast office for an East Coast firm — and an entrepreneurial bent.

“Liner was at the top of the list, and head and shoulders above the other alternatives. I called [managing partner] Stuart [Liner] and told him what we wanted to do. A short time later came over as partner,” Kessler told Law360.

Beyzaee said the timing is particularly opportune given the potential for shifting real estate tax laws under the administration of President Donald Trump, making it even more important to have cutting-edge expertise.

Kessler said he asked a well-known lawyer in Los Angeles who knew both Kessler and Liner: “He was a guy who would have said, ‘That would be a horrendous mistake.’ He said, ‘I know Stuart and know you. This is a Harvard casebook study, and a phenomenal combination. It ought to work out as well or better than any other combination I’ve ever heard of.’”

Kessler, a Rochester, New York, native, studied law at University of Michigan Law School after earning an undergraduate degree at Cornell University.

He started his law career as an associate at McDermott Will & Emery LLP in Chicago in 1973 before moving to Los Angeles in 1977. There he started as an associate at Cox Castle & Nicholson LLP before making partner in 1980. Later he became partner at Greenberg Hennigan & Mercer, which became Greenberg & Kessler, where he worked from 1983 to 1987.

In 1987, he founded Kessler & Kessler, where he has worked with his partner and wife Joan for 22 years; she focuses on arbitration and mediation and is not joining the trio at Liner. He was named to Southern California’s Super Lawyers list in 2006, 2007 and 2008.

Wiener attended New York University School of Law, where he earned his J.D. in 2007 and LL.M. in taxation in 2010. After working as an international tax consultant for Deloitte Tax LLP from 2010 to 2012, he briefly worked as a deputy city attorney in Los Angeles. He started his own practice later in 2012 before joining Kessler & Kessler in 2013. He earned a history degree from Columbia University as an undergraduate.

Houpert earned her J.D. in 2010 at University of Southern California’s Gould School of Law after earning a business degree from the University of Maryland. She had worked for Emily S. Levin from 2010 to 2012, Greenberg Traurig LLP from 2013 to 2015, and Kessler & Kessler since then.

--Editing by Richard McVay and Breda Lund.