

Energy Group Of The Year: Bracewell

By **Michelle Casady**

Law360, Houston (January 22, 2018, 3:14 PM EST) -- Bracewell LLP attorneys in 2017 took the lead in many significant transactions, including representing Great Plains Energy Inc. in a \$14 billion merger with the largest electric utility in Kansas, which exemplifies why the firm has been named among Law360's Energy Practice Groups of the Year for the sixth time in eight years.

Representative work Bracewell's attorneys have done over the past year include transactions for upstream, midstream and downstream clients as well as some involving conventional power, and renewable or alternative energy. G. Alan Rafte, who is the leader of the energy practice group and a two-time winner of Law360's energy MVP award, told Law360 that the firm focuses on three key areas: energy, finance and technology.

"When you look at our finance business, most of what we do is lending and borrowing in the energy space," he said. "And when you look at our technology space, most of our clients are energy companies. When you dissect our revenues, more than 70 percent of our revenue comes out of the energy space. I think the reason people see us as leaders in the energy space is because that's our dominant business."

The firm employs a total of 400 attorneys with about 150 dedicated to the energy practice. While most of those attorneys work in the firm's Houston headquarters, some practice out of the firm's other 10 offices worldwide, including in London, Dubai, New York, Austin, Seattle and Washington.

Rafte told Law360 it was the "brilliance" of one of the firm's energy partners that led to the approval of the \$14 billion merger between Great Plains and Westar Energy that was announced in July. The new utility is expected to serve about 1 million customers in Kansas and 600,000 in Missouri.

"The interesting thing about this deal [is] it got announced and the local utility regulatory agencies rejected the transaction and everybody thought it was dead," Rafte said, explaining the April denial of the initial proposal. "They thought it was over after about a year of work on this thing. But our lead partner on this, John Klauberg, resurrected it. Literally resurrected it and was able to come up with some creative solutions."

In a deal closed in January 2017, the firm represented DCP Midstream LLC in a transaction with Phillips



66 and Spectra Energy, valued at about \$11 billion, that created the largest gathering and processing master limited partnership in the country.

In the renewable and alternative energy space, Bracewell attorneys advised Statoil unit Statoil Wind US LLC in its successful bid, awarded in December 2016, for a federal wind lease off New York's coast. The company won the auction for 79,350 acres with a bid of more than \$42.46 million in a deal Rafté said the was the “first of its kind.” The competitive process involved 33 rounds of bidding and the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management executed the lease with Statoil Wind in March 2017. Bracewell continues to defend Statoil Wind in lawsuits brought by seafood industry groups and municipalities who are trying to block the lease.

Bracewell partner Austin Lee had a lead role in the firm's representation of Parsley Energy Inc. in a \$2.8 billion deal signed in February to acquire entities that held undeveloped and producing acreage in the Midland Basin from Double Eagle Energy.

Lee told Law360 work on that transaction went quickly, taking less than three weeks between the time Bracewell was selected to represent Parsley in the deal and when the paperwork was signed finalizing it. Lee characterized the deal as among the last of the blockbuster, billion-dollar deals made in the Permian.

“I thought it was a very significant deal for the space generally and our firm specifically,” he said. “This was a very collaborative effort with our corporate securities group because half of the consideration was stock ... We were able to capitalize on really a yearsworth of doing Permian deal after Permian deal and this represents the full-service nature of Bracewell's capabilities in the energy space — from the land component all the way up to the corporate securities M&A component.”

Austin, who worked as an independent petroleum landman before beginning his legal career, chalked up the firm's dominance in the energy sector, at least in part, to its hiring of seasoned professionals with industry experience, including former engineers.

“I think what it comes down to ... is we're more efficient and honestly, more valuable, because you can't do these types of deals in the oil and gas arena without understanding the assets at the heart of it,” he said. “We provide our clients with a lot more valuable advice because we understand how the assets work ... We have not just good oil and gas lawyers, but oil and gas professionals and counselors.”

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