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Long Islanders are increasingly turning to such states as Florida for favored business and tax climate
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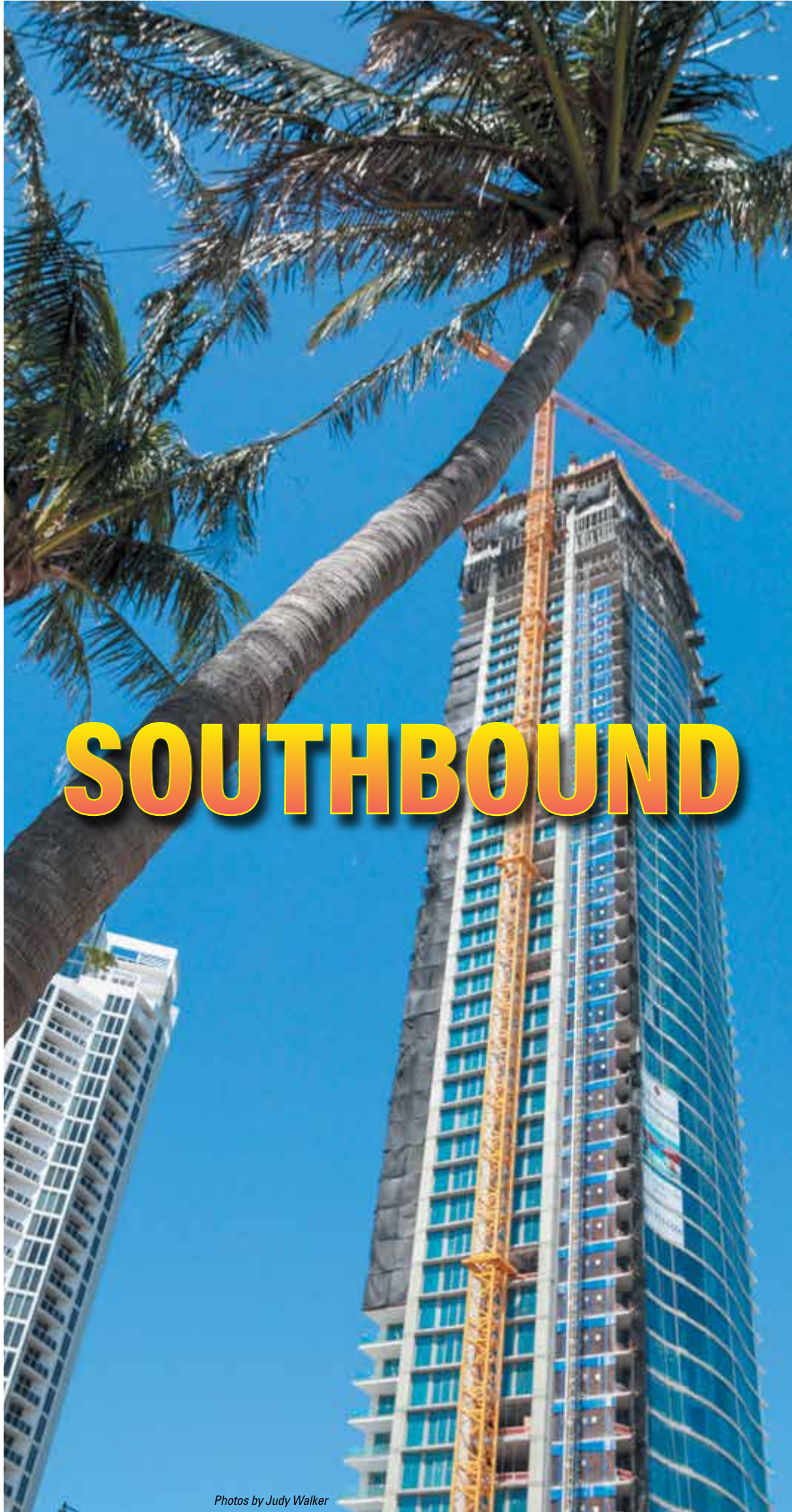
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COVERSTORY



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Photos by Judy Walker

Long Islanders are increasingly turning to such states as Florida for favored business and tax climate

By ADINA GENN

If you hop on a flight from Long Island MacArthur Airport to South Florida, don't be surprised to spot attorneys, elected and other business leaders from New York on the plane. They like the warm weather, sure, but the business climate there is part of the big draw.

Lew Meltzer – the chairman of the Mineola-headquartered law firm, Meltzer, Lippe, Goldstein & Breitstone – estimates that as many as 15 percent of the firm's clients have a base in New York and Florida.

On Monday, the 50-year-old firm opened an office in Boca Raton, with the already established practices of two Florida-based trusts and estates attorneys and a paralegal. The firm also has a satellite office in Miami.

Trust and estates was the right practice area for the firm's Florida launch, David Heymann, Meltzer Lippe's managing partner, told LIBN.

"We saw a need," he said, adding that South Florida is where many of the firm's "clients are and the potential is." And as time goes on, Heymann anticipates the office adding more practice areas. The new office is the firm's third, having added a Park Avenue location in 2020.

For businesses with a New York presence, expansion into Florida, favored by many high-net worth individuals, makes good business sense. In New York State's recently signed budget, those earning more than \$1 million a year and couples earning more than \$2 million a year will see increases to their personal income tax rate.

The tax increases for top earners, experts say, will prompt an exodus, as wealthier New Yorkers will move themselves and their businesses to more tax-friendly states, including Florida.

Yet Florida's gain presents new challenges for Long Island.



Kyle Strober

Kyle Strober, executive director of the Association for a Better Long Island, said Albany's actions are driven not by budget realities but political ideology.

"Based on the billions of dollars in federal aid being funneled into New York that has been championed by Sen. Schumer,

it is unfathomable that Albany politicians have put into place a draconian tax structure that invites high-net-worth individuals and corporations to leave thereby shifting the burden onto the backs of Long Island's middle class," Strober recently told LIBN.

Still, many New Yorkers have already claimed a presence in Florida.

On the culinary side, for example, Ben's Kosher Deli has a busy location in Boca Raton, satisfying the consumer palate for authentic knishes, hot pastrami and matzo ball soup.

And in the healthcare space, both NYU Langone and Mayo Clinic have a footprint in Florida. That stake allows patients "to maintain their relationships," said Bernie Rosof, a trustee of Huntington Hospital, who is a Meltzer Lippe client. And thanks to technology, he said, the easy transfer of records streamlines the process for patients and practitioners.

That increasing New York presence in Florida was something Meltzer Lippe recognized.

"A number of clients with high-net worth are starting to migrate there," Heymann said. The new office gives us "the ability to attain new clients. There is a huge connection between New York and southeast Florida. A lot of people go back and forth. This is a natural outgrowth of our practice areas," he added about the new location.

But in establishing a presence in a new state, there are "a whole set of rules to escape New York," requiring a "coordinated effort," Meltzer said. That effort calls for expertise and trust, experts said.

"You need to have relationships, which are always built on trust over a period of years," Rosof said. "It's hard to reestablish with someone new."

In opening the Boca office, Meltzer Lippe brought in experts "with a foothold here," Heymann said.

'THERE IS A HUGE CONNECTION BETWEEN NEW YORK AND SOUTHEAST FLORIDA.'

That includes Seth Kaplan, the managing partner of the office. Kaplan most recently served as a shareholder in the private wealth group at Gunster, a nearly 100-year-old Florida law firm. Also joining the firm is Jennifer Eimersen from the Miami law firm Bilzin Sumberg, who focuses on high-net-worth individuals. And Patty Gonzalez, a seasoned trusts and estates paralegal, joins the firm from Proskauer, a law firm with offices across the globe. At the office's launch were Heymann and Gary Meltzer, who chairs the firm's real estate practice group, to ensure for a smooth opening.

Highgate, a real estate investment firm with an office in New York, already has a strong presence in Florida, with its primary focus in the hospitality sector, and a new corporate footprint there as well.

The firm already works with Meltzer Lippe in Mineola, but Matt Gunlock, a principal at Highgate, said his team was "excited to learn that Meltzer Lippe is opening a physical outpost in South Florida," Gunlock said, adding that the move enables Highgate to access legal expertise in New York and Florida.

For some, the expanded presence is a path for the future.

The new office "will be a springboard for the firm for the next 50 years," Heymann said.

David Winzelberg and Associated Press contributed to this report.

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David Heymann, Seth Kaplan and Gary Meltzer outside Meltzer Lippe's new Boca Raton office.