

IMMIGRATION LAW FIRM OF THE MONTH

Bashyam Shah LLP

Understanding the Stakes and Emotions

BY BOB FRIEDMAN

PHOTOS BY HEADSHOTS AND CORPORATE



■ HAYLEY PICKARD, DEANNA ROTH, CHERYL GAFFNEY, RASHMI SHAH, MURALI BASHYAM, ALLISON LUKANICH, JESSICA BATZEL, AND ESTHER OH

“The success of a company is its people, and we know that talent matters,” said Murali Bashyam, founder of Raleigh-based, immigration law firm, Bashyam Shah LLP. At many leading-edge companies in the Triangle, some of that talent was born overseas and are very valuable assets because of their experience and expertise.

Yet over time, they face immigration issues because of changes in their immigration status. So employing foreign nationals comes with some risk. “If a company wants to hire a foreign worker, we know how to guide them through the immigration process, so they have the best chance of getting the talent they need. Our job is to give them honest advice, and only by doing so can companies make informed decisions on their personnel choices,” said Bashyam.

Seventy percent of Bashyam Shah’s clients are corporations. The firm works closely with in-house attorneys and private practice attorneys representing companies. The client base includes startups, small-to-medium size companies, and large global multinational corporations. As a boutique immigration law firm, it handles a wide array of issues from workers, students, and family visas to green cards, deportation, and asylum.

Bashyam Shah has long-term relationships with many of its corporate clients. “We know how they are different, and the different approaches we need to take with them based on their business philosophies,” said Bashyam. “The common questions are not always technical. They mostly focus on communication and delivery. They always want honest and prompt communication, followed by legal expertise that can help them achieve their goals.”

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■ MURALI BASHYAM



■ ALLISON LUKANICH

“A lot of times, we’re the therapist, social worker and the guidance counselor for our clients,” said attorney Allison Lukanich. “I think that is what makes us so unique as a boutique law firm. We have the bandwidth to serve the clients in that way when needed.”

Immigration law extends into almost every sub-section of law, where both individuals and companies are involved—accordingly, the firm interfaces with business, estate planning, family, and criminal attorneys.

A BUMPY RIDE

Immigration law has been a bumpy ride for decades. “We’ve always hoped that some administration regardless of political affiliation, would do something with immigration in a positive way but that really hasn’t happened,” explained Bashyam. “I think they need to be updated for the global economy for not just companies but families as well.”

Changes in immigration law can be sweeping, such as President Trump’s order in June to block visas for some skilled workers who enter the country under the H-1B visa. They all have a common denominator; nobody likes surprises.

“The HR departments really rely on us to be up-to-date and very proactive in terms of immigration news,” said partner Rashmi Shah. “They are partners in a sense where they rely on us, if anything is changing with any of their employees or if we see something coming down the road that might even be a rumor. We make sure that there is open communication, we’re on the same page, and we keep everyone positive.”

“As the immigration climate has gotten stricter and more demanding, we have learned how to adapt and answer to different Requests for Evidence (RFEs) or just in original filings to be able to avoid an RFE. Where other attorneys or employers would see an RFE as an indication of a failed case and an impending denial, our attorneys and paralegals don’t bat an eye,” said Bashyam.

A PERSON BEHIND THE PROCESS

Shah and her family were out for a walk in their neighborhood recently when a man stopped to introduce himself. “He said, ‘my name is Srinivas. You got my green card. I wouldn’t be living here without you.’ His whole case came to mind. It was a very complicated case. Then he starts pulling in everyone

from the neighborhood who was walking by, saying, ‘this is Rashmi Shah!! this is Rashmi Shah!! this is Rashmi Shah!!,’” she recalled with a laugh. “Moments like that reminded me that even though we do a lot of corporate immigration, there’s always a person, family and community behind every application we file.”

“Immigration law can be stressful for clients. So much is riding on it, whether they are a company, employee or an individual. We are willing to walk through the entire immigration process with our clients no matter how many times they ask. We really want them to understand the process,” explained Bashyam.

25TH ANNIVERSARY

Murali Bashyam’s parents are originally from India. They moved to Toronto, where Murali and his sister were born. They all moved to Raleigh when his father was transferred by his company. Murali earned a Bachelor of Arts, cum laude, in Economics from Wake Forest University and a Juris Doctor from the Wake Forest University School of Law.

Rashmi Shah was born in England. At the age of seven, she moved with her family to Goldsboro when her father was transferred for his job. She graduated from UNC-Chapel Hill with a Bachelor of Arts in Political Science. She earned her Juris Doctor from the University of North Carolina School of Law where she also worked in the Immigration and Human Rights Policy Clinic. Shah joined the Bashyam firm in 2011.

The firm is celebrating its 25th anniversary this year. “Do Roger Federer or Serena Williams have to think about the mechanics of hitting a backhand as much now as they did when they were 22? No,” said Bashyam. “After 25 years of experience, we can analyze cases, laws, and case strategy very quickly as if it’s second nature.

“Having done this for 25 years, we understand the stakes and emotions involved in the process. We not only know how the client feels, but we know how best to achieve the desired result for them.”

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