



2021 Women in Building Services: Sami Groff, Meltzer, Lippe, Goldstein & Breitstone, LLP

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Name: Sami Groff

Title: Partner and Chair, Environmental Practice Group

Company Name: Meltzer, Lippe, Goldstein & Breitstone, LLP

What did you want to be when you grew up?

Growing up I always thought I wanted to be a veterinarian. I loved nature and the idea of treating and healing animals. However, my grandfather was a lawyer, and I was also drawn to his stories from the courtroom and the way he used his legal practice to help those in need.

In the past year, what project, transaction or accomplishment are you most proud of?

I am most proud of making a move last year from Schulte, after 23 years, to start up an environmental practice at Meltzer, Lippe, Goldstein & Breitstone LLP in Mineola. I feel privileged to have this opportunity and thankful for the many clients who joined me in the move. I've enjoyed the continuity of working with my existing clients (mainly banks and lenders in the real estate finance and CMBS spaces) while growing my practice to encompass additional areas of environmental law through Meltzer Lippe's real estate and corporate practice groups. I've represented property owners in regulatory enforcement matters, in purchase and sale transactions, and in compliance with the many aspects of New York's newly amended lead paint laws.

What led you to your current profession?

Eventually my academic strengths in language and advocacy led me to go to law school, rather than veterinary school. After graduation, I worked at the New York City firm Schulte Roth & Zabel. I was fortunate to be assigned to work with the Environmental Department, where I discovered that I could combine my interests in the environment and nature with legal advocacy and representation of clients in transactions addressing environmental matters.

Who was/is your mentor and how did s/he influence/help you in your career?

The outstanding lawyers I worked with for so many years at the Schulte environmental department

were also invaluable mentors. Howard Epstein taught me to have confidence in my abilities, when he suddenly left me at Penn Station on our way to a Clean Air Act trial in federal court in Baltimore, telling me, "Not to worry. You can handle it on your own." Ted Keyes, one of the best writers I know, helped me hone my writing skills over years of collaborating on writing and revising documents with him. Larry Schnapf knows everything there is to know about environmental law (and baseball, dinosaurs and the JFK conspiracy). All three are continuing resources of support and encouragement to me in my new venture.

What trends will dominate your industry in the coming months?

I expect the real estate finance and CMBS spaces will continue to be busier, as more lenders are getting back to underwriting and originating more loans after the months of Coronavirus related slowdown. New York City will continue increased enforcement of its amended lead paint laws, which now have expanded applicability to all rental units in New York City.

What books or social media influencers would you recommend to other women?

Tova Leigh is one of my favorite social media influencers. An actor and former attorney, Leigh employs both funny and serious posts to highlight the unrealistic expectations set by most social media influencers, focusing on body positivity issues and combatting rape culture. While she takes on many controversial matters, she also adds a much-needed dose of humor and perspective.

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