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EXECUTIVE PROFILE | BRIAN A. RENSTROM

Man in the middle

To grow blumshapiro's Mass. presence, Brian Renstrom is focused on the middle market

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About five years ago, the accounting firm then known as Blum, Shapiro and Co. sought to enlarge its share of the lucrative Massachusetts market.

Since 2011, blumshapiro – as the West Hartford, Conn.-based firm is known – had made a concerted push into Massachusetts, so its Bay State ranks swelled from 25 employees in 2011 to 135 employees in 2018 – and one-third of its revenue came from Bay State business. In a few short years, blumshapiro was transforming itself into an accounting and advisory firm with a powerful Massachusetts presence. It wanted more.

In 2016, blumshapiro tapped an insider, Brian Renstrom, to serve as managing partner for Massachusetts and to develop a Bay State advisory business. “Massachusetts is the growth engine for blumshapiro,” Renstrom said. “I’m here to put a focus on that and to make sure we attack that in a smart and logical way.”

Renstrom was a natural choice; he’d worked in Boston for Arthur Andersen in the ‘90s, so he knew the lay of the land, and he had experience building advisory groups from scratch. Prior to Renstrom’s arrival in Boston, blumshapiro’s growth strategy involved acquiring local accounting firms. Between 2011 and 2015, blumshapiro bought Rockland-based Needel, Welch & Stone, Braintree’s Schneider & Schneider Associates, and Newton-based Friedman Suvall & Salomon – deals adding over 50 employees.

Expect more of the same. Now, blumshapiro is looking to expand its presence to the North Shore and Worcester, Renstrom said, even as it builds out its 26,000-square-foot Quincy office to fit another 200 employees.

“We’re still looking to do acquisitions both in traditional tax and audit and the advisory space,” Renstrom said.

An industry trend of upward mergers has created an opportunity for blumshapiro to grow in Massachusetts. As regional accounting and advisory firms merged into larger international ones focused on public companies, Renstrom explained, the broad middle market of businesses were often left without accountants,



auditors and advisers. As it stepped in to fill the gap, blumshapiro’s revenue has increased year-over-year – last year by 22 percent, Renstrom said.

Also, as a result of the merger trend, blumshapiro has been able to recruit talented people who, for a variety of reasons, Renstrom suggested, don’t find working at larger firms fulfilling. “The most worthwhile part (of the advisory business) is seeing what you advise get done,” Renstrom said. “It’s difficult to see in a large, multinational firm where you usually are doing just a small piece.”

A Connecticut native studying engineering at Worcester Polytechnic Institute, Renstrom figured on a career as a factory engineer. That was, until 1982, when Arthur Andersen recruited him to join its management information consulting division. Renstrom worked for Andersen’s Boston office from 1994 until 2000. After a brief stint at PwC, also in Boston, he heard a handful of former Andersen colleagues had landed happily at blumshapiro, and so he joined them in 2004.

After all these years, Renstrom, 58, said his entrepreneurial spirit and competitive fire still burns, which former Andersen colleague George R. Neble said has been a trait since his early days. In addition to his entrepreneurial and

strategic focus, Neble said, Renstrom’s talents as a communicator and leader will shine as the company expands in Massachusetts. “He’s the right person at the right time for blumshapiro,” said Neble, who is now senior adviser to Avalt Holdings, a private equity firm and family office.

Allan D. Koltin, CEO of Koltin Consulting Group in Chicago, facilitates strategy sessions at partner retreats for accounting firms and has known Renstrom for about 15 years. He described Renstrom as a “deep strategic thinker” with “a passion for success.”

To succeed, Renstrom said he hopes to keep blumshapiro ahead of industry change. Although adding offices, Renstrom noted blumshapiro has adopted the mindset of a virtual company and employees have access to technology allowing them to work anywhere, anytime.

Also, the company is keenly aware of a fast-moving challenge to the industry: the application of artificial intelligence to data analysis. Like the Big Four firms, blumshapiro has hired data analysts as more powerful computing transforms the speed and way clients’ financial data is analyzed.

“The industry will probably face some of its most dramatic challenges in the next five-to-seven years,” Renstrom said. “If you stick your head in the sand, you’re going to be in trouble.”