

MVP: King & Spalding's Tim Burbury

By **Melissa Angell**

Law360 (September 27, 2021, 4:28 PM EDT) -- Tim Burbury of King & Spalding's construction practice is advising a developer on a \$500 billion construction project that aims to build out a new city roughly the size of Belgium, earning him a spot as one of Law360's 2021 Construction MVPs.

HIS BIGGEST ACCOMPLISHMENT OVER THE PAST YEAR:

It takes a lot to build a city, which Burbury has learned as primary construction counsel for NEOM's construction program as it develops a new metropolis — the Line, a cross-border smart city that will stretch 170 kilometers across the northern portion of Saudi Arabia.

One cornerstone of the project is that it will run on completely renewable energy. The planned city touts "zero cars, zero streets and zero carbon emissions," according to a press release.

"While the project is still in its evolutionary phase, we have been fortunate to have been part of it from its inception, where it was a concept," Burbury said. "Seeing it realized is fantastic."

Burbury considers his work on the project one of his greatest accomplishments. He and his team handle the drafting and negotiation of all types of construction contracts, together with related contracts such as consultancy agreements and equipment supply contracts.

The scale of the project alone is tremendous, he said, noting that it's the largest construction project ever to date. The city will be about the size of Belgium and involves more than 10 years of drafting and negotiation of major construction contracts. The Line will also attract the majority of major construction contractors within the Middle East, he said.

"These types of projects don't come along very often. In fact, I don't think it has ever been done before, certainly not on this scale," he added. "This is a project that every lawyer practicing construction law wants to be a part of, so it's an honor and a privilege to be a part of that journey now, and hopefully over the next decade as NEOM realizes its vision. That's quite unique from a construction perspective."



HIS BIGGEST CHALLENGE OVER THE PAST YEAR:

The pandemic has posed some challenges for Burbury's line of work, which often involves working on a client's premises.

"We've had to work around that, and one of the ways we have maintained daily client contact has been through [Microsoft] Teams," Burbury said. "But it has also required a special effort from my colleagues to make the commitment during COVID to travel to site to work closely with our client. That has been a unique challenge during this period, with restrictions requiring the navigation of some interesting travel routes!"

WHY HE'S A CONSTRUCTION ATTORNEY:

One deal was all it took to draw Burbury to the construction practice.

But his focus was on other areas of the law during his first three years working as an attorney. Roughly 20 years ago, Burbury worked as an articulated clerk and associate at Butler McIntyre & Butler, a law firm located in Hobart, the capital of Australia's island state of Tasmania. He dabbled in all types of law in that role — from criminal law to commercial transactions, until one day his father asked him if he could do the construction contracts for a wastewater treatment plant in the United Arab Emirates.

Although Burbury admitted it was a bit out of his depth at the time, he worked with a team of lawyers who showed him the ropes. And what he learned from that deal was the catalyst for his construction career, and he's never looked back.

Burbury hinted that the construction practice also runs in the family given that his father is an engineer. Plus, one of his brothers owns an engineering company and the other owns a mining company.

"I think it was in my DNA that I was going to do something with an engineering or construction slant," he said. "I was the black sheep that went down the law path. But I didn't stray far and chose fairly early on in my career to pursue a construction law practice."

HIS ADVICE FOR JUNIOR ATTORNEYS:

Rather than rushing to specialize in one area of the law, Burbury recommends that junior attorneys learn everything that they can.

"Take on anything that comes your way when you are starting out a career in the law," he said. "But don't try to run a million miles an hour, because you will burn out. A career in the law is a marathon, not a sprint."

Taking that time allows younger attorneys to explore different types of practices, he said.

"Find that thing that you most enjoy, that you are most passionate about," he said. "Once you find that, plan from that point to become an expert in the area. Getting up every day is easy after that."

— *As told to Melissa Angell*

Law360's MVPs are attorneys who have distinguished themselves from their peers over the past year through high-stakes litigation, record-breaking deals and complex global matters. A team of Law360 editors selected the 2021 MVP winners after reviewing nearly 900 submissions.

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