

'Petty' Complaints or Poor Security at City Plaza?

REAL ESTATE: Law firm plans exit, cites lack of "decorum"

■ By MARK MUELLER

The second-largest law firm in Orange is on the lookout for office space after alleging its current location at the high-profile City Plaza tower has become an unsafe and unpleasant working environment.

Law firm **Brady, Vorwerck, Ryder & Caspino**, which counts about 27 local lawyers and 60 employees in total, is about three years into a 10-year lease for City Plaza, a 19-story tower located 1 City Boulevard, next to The Outlets at Orange shopping center.

The firm doesn't plan to see out the lease, according to **Michael Caspino**, a partner in the firm since its inception in 1996.

"People are scared to come to work," Caspino said.

The law firm's concerns—concerns it says it shares with other tenants in the building—appear to center on the behavior of employees of mortgage and consumer lender **CashCall Inc.**, a new and growing tenant at the building.

Brady, Vorwerck has cited a litany of problems related to a "general lack of overall business decorum" by individuals believed to be CashCall employees. The law firm also says it has observed near-fights, hate speech, harassment and other serious matters on office grounds.

"It's a very rough crowd," Caspino said.

CashCall recently became the 334,000-square-foot building's largest tenant, after inking a 125,208-square-foot lease earlier this year. The company now has its name atop the building, which is owned by Los Angeles-based **Hudson Pacific Properties Inc.**

Lawyers representing Hudson Pacific deny that there are any security problems at the building, and have characterized Brady, Vorwerck's attitude toward CashCall as "arrogant and offensive."

1,600 OC Workers

CashCall, founded in 2003, has grown to be one of the largest mortgage and consumer finance lenders in the U.S. during the past few years. It employs an estimated 1,600 people in OC, and said earlier this year it's on pace for about \$600 million in revenue this year.

Calls to company officials seeking comment last week were not returned.

Brokers representing CashCall said that the company and other local lending companies started by CashCall founder **J. Paul Reddam** have no history of causing security problems at other buildings they've occupied.

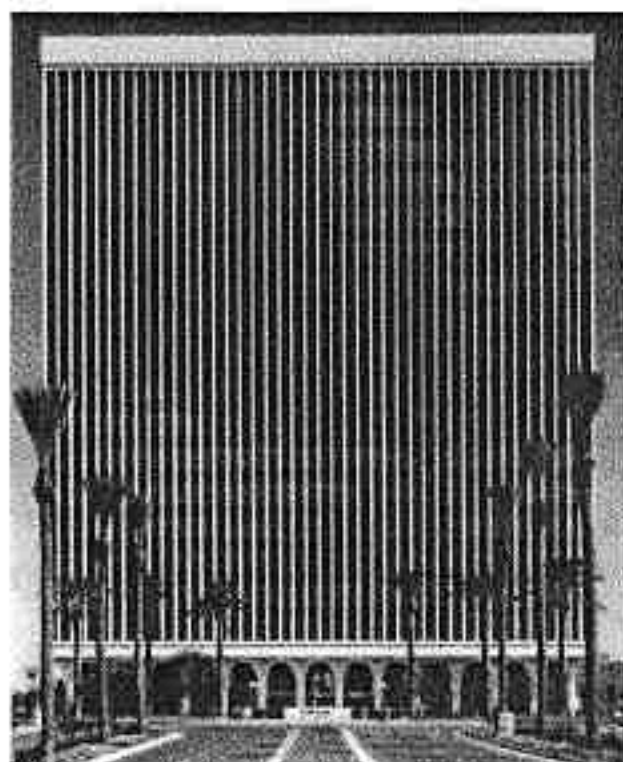
"They've been a tenant for some of the most prestigious landlords in Orange County, and they all give good references on them," said **Jay Carnahan**, president of Irvine-based **Orion Property Partners Inc.**

"They all still want them as a tenant," Carnahan said.

Officials representing Hudson Pacific deny the law firm's charges about the property being unsafe since CashCall's arrival.

"It is unfortunate and somewhat ironic that (Brady, Vorwerck) is attempting to bully another tenant in the building under the guise that they are afraid of them," said **Bryan Freedman**, a partner with Century City-based **Freedman + Taitelman LLP**, the law firm representing Hudson Pacific in the dispute.

There have been "no threatening incidents that would cause such fear," said Freedman, who believes the tenant's actions are merely part of an effort at getting out of their



City Plaza: landlord calls complaints about CashCall employees "trivial annoyances"

lease early.

Brady, Vorwerck said it has organized meetings with other tenants in the building, which led to a request last month for the landlord to "retain an independent security consultant to perform an assessment of security needs at this building."

Initial requests for the independent security analysis were reportedly denied by the landlord, which last month filed a complaint against Brady, Vorwerck regarding the terms of its lease.

The complaint, filed in Orange County Superior Court, asks the court to declare that the landlord has not breached its terms of the lease. The complaint describes the law firm's complaints as "petty grievances" that do not constitute actionable wrongdoing on the part of the landlord.

Several of the law firm's grievances—including CashCall employees smoking in non-smoking areas, parking in the firm's reserved spaces, questionable dress codes, and inappropriate conversations and behavior on property grounds—"are trivial annoyances that are part of the inevitable petty trials and tribulations of everyday life" and do not constitute legal wrongdoing, according to the complaint.

The complaint also alleges that Brady, Vorwerck threatened to bring a class action lawsuit against the landlord.

No class action suit is planned, according to Caspino.

Brady, Vorwerck this month filed a notice of demurrer—essentially calling the landlord's complaint meritless and, Caspino said, a form of harassment—in reply to Hudson Pacific's complaint.

"We are just planning on getting out of this building," a decision made by the firm after Hudson Pacific opted to file the complaint, Caspino said.

The company is likely to look at space closer to John Wayne Airport, Caspino said.

Not every law firm tenant at the City Plaza tower is unhappy with their office space.

Walsworth Franklin Bevins & McCall LLP, the largest law firm in Orange by attorney count, has had their offices at City Plaza for nearly 20 years and isn't planning to move, said founding partner **Jeffrey Walsworth**.

"We couldn't be more secure" at City Plaza, said Walsworth, whose firm counts about 45 attorneys in Orange. "We're very comfortable here."

Walsworth noted that the FBI recently took over an office down the street from City Plaza, and has hundreds of agents working nearby. ■