

## Former SDNY Prosecutor And DEA Official Join Nardello & Co.

By **Marco Poggio**

*Law360 (February 1, 2022, 4:24 PM EST)* -- A former New York federal prosecutor and a former U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration official whose work together took down organized crime groups have joined global investigation firm Nardello & Co., the firm said Tuesday.

Howard Master, who served as a prosecutor with the Southern District of New York from 2007 to 2017, has become the managing director of the firm's New York office. He is also serving as counsel to the firm's CEO, Dan Nardello. Chris Urben, who had been with the DEA for 25 years, has taken up the managing director role at Nardello's office in Washington, D.C.



Howard Master

Master brings in diverse experience in prosecution, the firm said.

At the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Southern District of New York, where he served as deputy chief of its criminal division, Master led high-profile cases such as the prosecution of Sheldon Silver, a former speaker of the New York State Assembly who was convicted of corruption and died last month.



Chris Urben

As a senior enforcement counsel to the attorney general of New York, he oversaw both multistate and local investigations of the opioid industry that resulted in multiple settlements. He also led a civil enforcement action against Harvey Weinstein, his brother Robert, and The Weinstein Co. alleging company executives had failed to protect employees from Harvey Weinstein's sexual harassment.

More recently, serving as a special counsel in the Suffolk County District Attorney's Office, where he helmed the Conviction Review Unit, he led efforts to exonerate a man, Keith Bush, who was wrongfully convicted of murder.

"I'm really passionate about the power of investigation to discover the truth. And in the past, I was using that power to both hold wrongdoers accountable and, in my most recent job, to exonerate the wrongfully convicted," Master told Law360 Pulse. "I was looking for an opportunity to work with exceptional talent and good people to do the most complex investigations in a wide variety of fields. That's what I found with Nardello."

In his new roles, Master will lead Nardello's white collar defense, civil litigation, anti-corruption, and

fraud investigation and monitorship practices. He will also advise on the firm's global growth strategy.

Urben, meanwhile, joins the firm's litigation support practice and will boost the firm's international investigations work, the firm said.

He served in the DEA in various roles, most recently as an assistant special agent in charge of the Special Operations Division for Europe, Africa, the Middle East and the Far East. International investigations and undercover operations he led took down several transnational criminal organizations, the firm said.

"I'm looking forward to driving insight with speed for Nardello's client base with my global network of contacts," Urben told Law360 Pulse. "That's really what I bring, and what has made me successful."

Urben said he was attracted by the "pristine brand" Nardello created, and the reputation the firm enjoys across the global investigations and law enforcement communities.

Master said he was "thrilled" to join Nardello at the same time as Urben, who has been his law enforcement partner for over a decade.

The two started working together in 2008, when they took on a years-long case involving drug trafficking, money laundering, securities fraud and organized crime that resulted in several convictions and tens of millions of dollars in seized funds.

In that case, which ended with several people convicted at trial, Master and Urben investigated drug trafficking in the ports of New York and New Jersey. Authorities knew cocaine was coming in from Colombia via Panama. After flipping a senior longshoreman who had been offloading the drugs for some time, SDNY prosecutors and DEA agents discovered a "pump and dump" stock fraud scheme that was happening at the same time.

The case ultimately zeroed in on a crew of "eccentric" fraudsters who wandered the country in an RV looking for companies to take part in the scheme.

"That's one of the things I love about investigations," Master said. "If you really follow the thread, you can really discover some amazing things."

He added, "It was a fabulous experience, and I'm just thrilled to be working with Chris again."

In a call to Law360 Pulse, Nardello said Master and Urben are "terrific" additions to the firm.

"As you might imagine, we did our due diligence before we hired them," Nardello said. "The consensus and the feedback were really unanimous that these two guys are the best investigators of their generation."

He added, "In addition to being wicked smart, having enormous experience, they're also lovely people, and that is very important to work into our culture."

Nardello himself was a federal prosecutor for the SDNY from 1987 to 1994. He founded Nardello & Co. in 2003 with a \$30,000 investment and opened its first office in London. Since then, the firm's practice has grown significantly, particularly in Asia, where it has established offices in Hong Kong, Tokyo and Dubai.

The arrival of Master and Urben follows the June addition of John Auerbach, a seasoned investigator who led Ernst & Young's fraud investigation and disputes practice in Shanghai for eight years.

Some global investigation firms have been scrutinized in recent years for employing methods for retrieving information that bordered on illegality.

In a Q&A with Law360 Pulse in July, Nardello said his firm abides by the same ethical rules that control the conduct of lawyers. He reaffirmed that resolve on Tuesday.

"It is without question that both Howard and Chris understand our commitment to doing this work ethically and legally," he said. "They're going to join a team of folks who are committed to doing things the right way."

--Editing by Robert Rudinger.