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Long Island Business NEWS

The Bigger They Are, The Harder They Litigate

By Claude Solnik

Long Island law firms routinely keep busy serving clients, but many are busying themselves via expansion - in many cases, off the Island.

Many firms see the addition of new territories as key to boosting business. In June, Kaufman, Schneider & Bianco became Dolowich Schneider Bianco & Volluck after adding three new partners and moving from Jericho to Woodbury. At the same time, recognizing off-Island business potential, the 25-lawyer firm opened offices in Manhattan, Philadelphia and San Francisco.

Former St. Paul Travelers attorney Ivan J. Dolowich came on board to head the Manhattan office, while attorney Phillip Volluck joined up to head the Philadelphia office and attorney Katherine S. Catlos signed on to launched the San Francisco office.

"We're in a very nice growth stage right now," said managing partner Michael Kaufman. "And we've become known in the insurance industry."

While many law firms grow, those specializing in hot areas such as health care, insurance, finance, estate planning, real estate and environmental law are on a roll, adding bricks, mortar and bodies.

Great Neck-based Garfunkel, Wild & Travis, specializing in health care law, has grown by one-third from 2001, when it had 58 staff members and 48 attorneys (106 total), to 77 staff and 63 attorneys (140 total). Last year, Garfunkel, Wild opened an office in Hackensack, N.J., where already there are a half-dozen attorneys and plans to

hire more.

"The firm has a strong reputation in a growth area," said managing partner Robert Wild, noting Garfunkel, Wild is also hiring on Long Island.

Moritt Hock Hamroff & Horowitz last year opened a Manhattan office, seeking to better serve banks and asset-based lenders in and around New York City.

"We found that a lot of our clients are already in Manhattan and we have a very big presence in the financial services community," said Marc Hamroff, managing partner at the Garden City-based firm. "They were looking for us to handle their transactions in Manhattan as well as Long Island."

The members of the four-attorney firm Stein & Schonfeld joined Moritt Hock April 1, bringing expertise in the not-for-profit sector. Moritt Hock also set up a securities law department this year to better serve public companies.

While there haven't been any Long Island mega-mergers in recent years, smaller firms are regularly joining larger ones, fueling growth. Carle Place-based Groman, Ross & Tisman joined Forchelli, Curto, Schwartz, Mineo, Carlino & Cohn a few weeks ago, bringing five lawyers into the Forchelli Curto fold.

"It gives us more strength in real estate transaction work and estate work and litigation," said Jeff Forchelli, managing partner at Mineola-based Forchelli Curto.

While many firms are reaching west, others are expanding east, opening sec-

ond Long Island offices. Mineola-based Bellavia Gentile & Associates, specializing in franchised and licensed automobile and boat dealers, opened a four-person office in May in Bay Shore.

Spokesman Adam Schuman said the move was meant to "respond to the increasing number of Suffolk County dealerships retaining our law firm."

Uniondale-based Farrell Fritz also has been expanding eastward, opening an East Hampton office in February 2005 by merging Edwards & Duggan into its operations and operating out of that firm's office.

Theresa Quigley, a Farrell Fritz partners who worked in the firm's Bridgehampton office, relocated her practice to the East Hampton office. Farrell Fritz today operates two east end offices in the Hamptons in Bridgehampton and East Hampton.

While expansion - east or west - is important to many firms, some attorneys say their bread will always be buttered on Long Island. Kaufman, whose firm has expanded its Island office from 6,500 to 13,000 square feet, described the Island as a good base from which to grow - particularly because of its proximity to New York City.

"We like being Long Island-based," Kaufman said. "I like being near my family. I like being 10 minutes from my house. A lot of people we're hiring have that philosophy."