

FROM COVER

Houston law firm snares 11 attorneys

BY CHRISTINE HALL
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Margraves

Ross Margraves saw 18 new employees walk through the doors of Winstead PC's Houston law office late last week after the firm wooed 11 attorneys and eight support staff from another Houston firm, Beirne, Maynard & Parsons LLP.

It's the largest single group acquisition for the Dallas-based firm since 2008, said Peyton Smith, shareholder in charge of lateral hiring for the firm.

The deal had been in the works for months.

"It was at least a year ago when we started this dialogue," said Margraves, a shareholder and executive committee member in Houston.

The newly acquired attorney group is led by Jay Brown, who joins Winstead as equity shareholder.

Margraves said he admired Brown and his partners because they were cautious and concerned about the move and performed more due diligence on the deal than any other Margraves could recall in his 45 years as an attorney.

"It's a big step to think about moving firms and taking on a new venture," he added. "After having had time to absorb it, they came to the conclusion of, 'Let's do it.'"

The move by Winstead comes as a wave of legal sector hiring is under way in Houston by national law firms.

"Lawyers are transitioning from larger, national firms to more regional ones because their clients are feeling rate pressures," Smith said.

The time was right for the group to come over to Winstead, said Brown, who had been at Beirne, Maynard & Parsons 23 years. He and the nine other partners were able to leave amicably, he added.

"We are losing some good lawyers and friends, and we are sorry to see them go, but we recognize that their practices are better suited to the other firm," said Brit Brown, managing partner at Beirne, Maynard & Parsons.

Over the past few years, there has been a lateral hiring frenzy in Texas particularly as the energy sector has thrived, he said. And Beirne Maynard has done its own share of hiring recently to take advantage of the energy surge.

This week, the firm opened an office in San Antonio to cater to its client base involved in the Eagle Ford shale. Three attorneys were hired to manage the office.

Meanwhile, the new Winstead group is well-known for handling insurance disputes related to large commercial properties. In fact, the group's reputation garnered attention from other law firms that wanted to talk to Brown, as well.

"For us, though, Winstead was the Goldilock's firm — it was just right," Brown said. "Some of the other firms were too much one way or too much the other way. Winstead had a lot of capacity in terms of lawyers, and we were looking for a platform that was durable well into the future."

WINSTEAD PC

HQ: Dallas
TOP EXEC: Tom Forestier, managing shareholder in Houston
NO. OF HOUSTON ATTORNEYS: 59
FOUNDED: 1985
LOCAL OFFICES: Houston and The Woodlands

WHO'S COMING OVER

Jay Brown, equity shareholder
 Hilary Borow, income shareholder
 Brannon Dillard, associate
 Andrew Edelman, associate
 Matthew Foytlin, associate
 Sean Milligan, associate
 Dawn Norman, associate
 Lauren Sneed, associate
 Stephen Wedemeyer, income shareholder
 Bruce Wilkin, associate
 Carol Wilkin, associate

The group also was attracted to Winstead's "progressive and transparent management," as well as the fact that the firm's billing rates were similar.

The addition of the group gives Winstead 59 attorneys in Houston, Smith said.

In addition, the firm has made 17 lateral hires in the Houston office so far this year and has other recruitments in the works.

"And, due to this group's productivity, we already know that we will have to reach over into our own litigation group for support as well as eventually bring on additional people to service this group," Smith said.