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Stark & Stark Acquires Two Pa. Firms

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Stark & Stark has made a foray into Bucks County, Pa., with the acquisition of two small firms, bringing its total number of lawyers to 104.

The Lawrenceville firm picked up three lawyers from Liederbach, Hahn, Foy & Van Blunk of Richboro and four from Marston & Shensky of Doylestown.

The lawyers are now in the old firms' current offices, but a lease was signed last week for space in Newtown, Pa., and the seven lawyers and eight support staff will make the move before the end of the year.

Lawyers from 53-year-old Liederbach, Hahn focus on corporate, real estate and litigation for businesses. Partner Henry Van Blunk, for example, recently handled sales of two restaurants for a total of about \$5 million.

Marston & Shensky is a 26-year-old plaintiffs' personal injury firm with a record of million-dollar-plus medical malpractice verdicts and settlements throughout eastern Pennsylvania. In a much-publicized case, partner Edward Shensky sued a Doylestown hospital in June on behalf of the family of an Alzheimer's patient who was sexually assaulted by a staff member.

Marston & Shensky's Elliot Kolodny, who knows what it's like to be in large firms because he started his career at 160-lawyer Stradley Ronon Stevens & Young in Philadelphia, says there were no concerns about losing independence in a merger with Stark & Stark.

"We've known most of the key players over there and we know that their mind-set and our mind-set tie very well together," he says.

Now, instead of referring transactional and family work to other firms, the former Marston & Shensky lawyers can call in colleagues from the Liederbach, Hahn group and other Stark & Stark attorneys, Kolodny says.

Kolodny says his group was not in negotiations with other firms at the time of the July 9 deal with Stark & Stark.

Stark & Stark co-managing director Lewis Pepperman says the firm is following a strategy of growth by acquiring firms that can provide services to Stark & Stark's existing clients.

"We do a lot of work in Bucks County and eastern Pennsylvania, so this was a logical next step for our firm," he says. No consultants were involved in the acquisitions, he says.

He says the firm has worked with Marston & Shensky for many years with "referrals back and forth."

Stark & Stark's real estate group had done transactions with Van Blunk, and Pepperman says, "He was looking to grow and we were looking for an office in that area."

He says that Bucks County seems to be a fertile area for New Jersey firms seeking to grow. "There is a great client base out there and not many large firms, so I guess there is a lot of interest in the area," he says.

He says that when it comes to wooing other firms, Stark & Stark focuses less on the size of the book of business it can obtain than on future growth potential.

"When we add, whether it's attorneys in new firms or for our Lawrenceville office, the key thing we look for is potential for growth," he says. The main question is, "three or four or five years out, is this a person who we believe will stay with our firm, will grow, and will build something within the firm?" he says.

Pepperman says the firm is negotiating with an eight-lawyer firm in northern New Jersey that he declined to identify.

Stark & Stark had revenue of \$43.4 million, profits per partner of \$503,300 and revenue per lawyer of \$434,000 for the fiscal year that ended last Dec. 31, according to the *Law Journal* Top 20 survey published this past April. It was ranked at No. 17.