

LAW WEEK

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RBF Law Expands With Former Appellate Judge

Added capacity in appeals, arbitration part of firm growth

BY TONY FLESOR
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A year and a half after opening its doors, RBF Law is growing.

RBF opened in October 2015 with a group of attorneys who shared a Denver litigation firm pedigree of having all worked at both Reilly Pozner and Jones & Keller.

Since the beginning of the year, the litigation-focused firm has added five attorneys to its list of partners and associates — though two came as promotions from full-time staff attorney positions.

Anchoring the list of additions is former Colorado Court of Appeals Judge Marsha Piccone, who joined in May and bolsters the firm's appellate practice.

"The first year ... it felt like we were in a row boat and we were in some pretty big waves and got just over the top of the wave. But then a couple times, we looked around like, whoah if the wave gets any bigger, this is going to be a tough one to get over," partner Caleb Durling, said "We got through that first year and felt like we made it, we're doing ok, the bills are all paid, the lights are on, and in order to do what we think we need to do now and in the future we just need a little bit more bandwidth."

That increase in bandwidth included the addition of Piccone, Kasey Johnson and Edgar Barraza, as well as naming Corey Longhurst pro bono and community engagement associate and Michael Tanner associate.

The firm started with a combination of associates, staff attorneys and contract attorneys.



MARSHA PICCONE

Durling said the growth at the associate level has been opportunistic, meritocratic and a function of need.

The meritocratic growth has also come from moving some staff attorneys to associate attorneys after they had shown their value. "People continued that upward progression and we felt the only way to show that achievement was to say you're now an associate."

And for an example of an opportunistic hire, Johnson joined the firm after approaching the partners and they realized how she could be valuable to the firm.

Similarly, Piccone came to the firm after having a coffee meeting with one of the partners and talking about the potential move. Durling said the conversation about her joining the firm was a short email chain: "Marsha Piccone wants to work with us? Yeah we want to meet with her," he said.

Piccone comes to the firm after having worked as a Court of

Appeals judge from 2003 to 2005 and since then has worked at Snell & Wilmer, Wheeler Trigg O'Donnell and Gibson Arnold.

Since 2013, she has handled arbitrations and litigation through Piccone LLC.

Her experience in litigation and as an appellate judge will position her to take on appellate work for the firm and expand its litigation capabilities.

Piccone said that she was attracted to the law firm for its quality of lawyers and commitment to diversity and client service. She said she was also drawn to the national work that the litigation firm takes on.

"I wanted to do more appellate work and to be with a group of people I enjoyed and respected," Piccone said about her decision to join RBF. "It was the right time."

Going forward, Piccone will expand RBF's appellate practice as well as its alternative dispute resolution practice. Piccone said she will continue to work as an arbitrator with the firm as well. Her practice areas include appellate law, complex commercial litigation, alternative dispute resolution and products liability litigation.

She also serves as the appointed chair of the Colorado Supreme Court's Committee on Civil Jury Instruction.

Durling said that much of the growth has been with the intention of building and diversifying the firm's practice. As a litigation firm, RBF doesn't rely on much repeat business in the way that full-service or transactional-focused law firms might.

With its practice area, the firm

relies on bringing in multiple clients and expanding to regional or national work through the clients it does have.

The addition of Piccone allows the firm to leverage itself more in the Colorado area by relying on her connections and experience. Durling said the firm is now looking to continue building a base of Colorado clients and to use that to continue developing national work.

Also within the past several months, the firm made pro bono work a priority with the addition of Longhurst, who is the pro bono and community engagement associate at the firm.

In March, RBF hosted a workshop with the Rocky Mountain Immigrant Advocacy Network in order to train its attorneys on how to handle immigration cases. Durling said that immigration focus, specifically, is not reflective of a change in focus at the firm but that there is a more deliberate approach to its pro bono work.

As the firm approaches the end of its second year, the firm looks to grow in other ways beyond attorney count. Durling said there are no further plans for growth, and that now it looks to use its expanded capacity to grow its client base.

"It's not growth for growth's sake," Piccone said. "It's strategic in terms of the individuals and how they fit with the firm. I see a culture here that we want to maintain." •

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