

Alston Bird Land-Use Group Flies to Smaller Firm

DEVELOPMENT: Former area mayor leads move after closure of local office.

Jackson DeMarco Tidus & Peckenaugh has hired four lawyers, essentially absorbing the land-use practice of Alston & Bird LLP, a large Atlanta firm that closed its Ventura County office.

Jackson DeMarco is a Westlake Village firm with 47 attorneys at its headquarters and an Irvine office. It serves a clientele of developers, land owners and real estate investors.



LAW

Joel Russell

"The land-use market has been in the doldrums the last few years, but as we come out of the recession we have a number of clients that are reviving old projects, looking for acquisitions or picking up new projects," said Alim Malik, a shareholder in the firm who recruited the new lawyers. "We have the need to hire competent, well-recognized attorneys to fill the need."

The most high-profile of the new hires is Charles "Chuck" Cohen, former mayor of Thousand Oaks who also served on the city's planning commission. He has experience gaining approval for major projects, including the Village at Newbury Park shopping center and the Rusnak BMW dealership at the Thousand Oaks Auto Mall. In his new job, Cohen will work on project approvals includ-

ing public hearings, entitlements and California Environmental Quality Act compliance.

Cohen said Alston & Bird was more interested in corporate finance and litigation, so it made sense for he and his colleagues to move to Jackson DeMarco, where real estate is the focus.

In his new job, Cohen sees more small projects rather than the large developments he worked on in the past.

"The Conejo Valley cities all have general plans that are pretty well built out," he said. "What I see is redevelopment, infill, refreshing of existing industry and retail properties – and probably some conversion of residential to the current appetite of the marketplace."

Andy Begun, another of the new hires, will specialize in representing builders and lenders under Fannie Mae, Freddie Mac and similar housing loan programs, including bond and low-income housing tax-credit transactions. Carrie Deck will represent commercial real estate lenders and investors in secured financings, loan origination and securitized loan transactions.

Finally, Tom Cohen, son of Chuck Cohen, will provide legal project management for construction projects throughout California. Previously, he led the team that redeveloped the 100-acre former Northrop Grumman site in Thousand Oaks. He chairs the boards at both the United Way of Ventura County and the Alliance for the Arts, the organization that raises funds for the Thousand Oaks Civic Arts Plaza.

Alim said that in addition to Chuck Cohen, the firm has several other attorneys who are former public officials, including Mark Sellers, former city attorney for Thousand Oaks.

"It complements us to bring in public-policy insights to our private clients in how to move a project along," he said.

Rehab Firm

Former prosecutor David Kestenbaum has opened a new criminal defense law firm.

Kestenbaum Law Group APC is headquartered in Van Nuys with offices in Ventura and Century City. Kestenbaum previously served as a partner at the Van Nuys firm



Kestenbaum

Kestenbaum Eisner & Gorin (now Eisner & Gorin), which he left in December. From 1985 to 1992, he worked as a deputy district attorney at the Van Nuys courthouse.

Kestenbaum specializes in representing white-collar and professional crimes. He has participated in some high-profile cases, including the defense of a paparazzi photographer who chased after Justin Bieber and Bobby Chacon, the world-champion boxer from Pacoima who pleaded no contest to selling cocaine. He appears as a guest on Major League Baseball radio talking about athletes accused of crimes.

Kestenbaum said he plans to hook up his clients with a network of therapists, coaches and drug rehabilitation professionals in an effort to lower their chances of engaging in future criminal behavior.

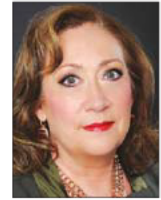
"If I help my clients learn to manage their lives, it is less likely that they will repeat the conduct that initially brought them into my office," he said in a statement.

Docket Items

Employment law attorney Lilit Tovmasyan has joined the firm LightGabler LLP.



Kurtz



Northrup

The Camarillo firm now has 11 attorneys. She will defend employers and managers in employment litigations. Tovmasyan speaks four languages, including Spanish and Russian. ... Barry Kurtz, founder of Woodland Hills law firm Kurtz Law Group, is dissolving his firm to join Lewitt Hackman Shapiro Marshall & Harlan as chair of the firm's Franchise Practice Group. Candice Lee and Bryan Clements, two other Kurtz attorneys, will also join Lewitt Hackman in Encino. They will pair with David Gurnick and Tal Grinblat at the practice group, which will represent franchisors, licensors, manufacturers, franchisees, licensees and distributors. ... Attorney Linda Northrup has been elected vice chairwoman of the Agoura Hills Planning Commission. A founding partner of the Westlake Village firm Northrup Schlueter, she represents individuals and institutions in business and real estate litigation. At the planning commission, she investigates and recommends how the city should organize its growth, and helps make decisions on applications for new commercial and residential developments.

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