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REGIONAL NEWS

Hill Wallack Continues to Expand in Bucks County

BY ZACK NEEDLES

Of the Legal Staff

While the legal landscape has been riddled with stagnant or shrinking firms over the last few years, Hill Wallack has quietly built one of the larger legal presences in Bucks County.

As of Nov. 1, the firm, which employs nearly 60 attorneys and has offices in Princeton and Atlantic City, N.J., has added a partner and a counsel to its Yardley, Pa., location, growing the office from one attorney when it opened in 2006 to 12 attorneys in 2010.

"We've been able to grow because we're disciplined and we're focused and we don't do things on impulse. We do it because it makes sense," said Francis J. Sullivan, managing partner of the Yardley office.

Sullivan, a lifelong Bucks resident, said he joined Hill Wallack four years ago specifically to help build its Bucks County presence.

On Sept. 1, Michael J. Shavel joined the firm's bankruptcy and creditors' rights practice in Yardley from Spector Gadon & Rosen in Philadelphia, almost 20 years to the day after he began his first stint at Hill Wallack.

Shavel joined the firm's Princeton office directly out of law school on Sept. 4, 1990, and worked there for eight years before leaving to join Blank Rome in Philadelphia and, eventually, Spector Gadon.

Two decades later, he brought with him Spector Gadon colleague D. Andrew Bertorelli Jr., who joined Hill Wallack on Sept. 8 as counsel in Princeton.

According to Shavel, it was the depth of Hill Wallack's creditors' rights practice that drew him back to the firm after all these years.

Shavel said the firm has "probably the largest or very close to the largest creditors' rights group in Bucks County and New Jersey," with nine of the 12 attorneys in the Yardley office practicing in that area.

Shavel said the practice depth at Hill Wallack allows him to take on larger cases.

It also means the firm has more support staff, he said, which gives him greater ability to staff certain matters with paralegals and to



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charge his clients at a discounted fee. And while Shavel said his rates will remain the same as they were at Spector Gadon, he made no bones about the fact that cost is very important to his clients.

"Rates are an issue," he said. "They're the reason I left Blank Rome. I loved the place ... but my clients don't want to pay those rates."

Shavel said his clients were "very supportive" of his decision to join Hill Wallack. Edward G. Fitzgerald, director of Spector Gadon, said the firm does not anticipate Shavel's and Bertorelli's departures will have a major impact on its business.

Sullivan said Shavel brought some "substantial" clients to the firm.

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— Francis J. Sullivan of Hill Wallack

Shavel described his client base as regional, but said he does represent some national banks and financial institutions.

Sullivan had a similar answer when asked to describe his office's client base.

"We do have some national clients, but we really are focused on Bucks County and the Philadelphia region," he said.

Shavel said one of the other things that attracted him to Hill Wallack's Yardley office was the fact that it is made up completely of

fellow Bucks County residents.

"We're all locals practicing in a local area and that's what I was looking for," he said.

Sullivan said that familiarity with the locale is essential to how the office conducts itself.

"We know the community, we know the courts and we know how to do business in Bucks County," he said.

On Nov. 1, a month after Shavel joined the firm, Carolyn M. Plump joined the firm's Yardley office from Mitts Milavec in Philadelphia as counsel in the labor and employment practice.

At the rate Hill Wallack has been expanding in Bucks over the last half-decade, it appears to be quickly gaining on some of the largest firms in the county.

Currently, only a handful of firms have more Bucks-based lawyers.

According to their websites, these firms include Philadelphia-based Fox Rothschild, which has 29 attorneys in its Warrington office; Morrisville-based Curtin & Heefner, which has 27 Bucks-based lawyers; Doylestown-based Eastburn & Gray, which has 24; Langhorne firm Begley Carlin & Mandio, which has 18; and New Jersey-based Stark & Stark, which opened its Newtown office in 2008 and has 17.

Sullivan said the overall vision for Hill Wallack in Bucks County is to "build an extensive commercial practice" and that every addition to the Yardley office is a step toward that goal.

"It's an exciting place to be," he said. •

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