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Chicago Firm Split Creates New Insurance-Focused Outfit

By **Andrew Strickler**

Law360, New York (January 07, 2014, 5:31 PM ET) -- Chicago firm Bates Carey Nicolaides LLP has split, with more than two dozen lawyers, including name partner Richard Nicolaides Jr., leaving to form a competing partnership representing commercial insurers, firm leaders announced Tuesday.

That departed group of 29 attorneys will be joined at the new firm, Nicolaides Fink Thorpe Michaelides Sullivan LLP, by four other lawyers, including former Gordon & Rees LLP insurance partner Sara Thorpe.

The firm says the new firm joins the largest U.S. partnership focused solely on representing global insurers. It includes lawyers with a range of related experience, including litigating intellectual property and unfair business practice disputes, addressing coverage in relation to terrorism financing lawsuits, construction defect and asbestos claims and cybercrime.

"There are a lot of firms that do insurance defense and coverage, general litigation, but our focus is on the insurance coverage exclusively and the big disputes," Nicolaides said. "What we're doing is building a platform ... with some of the best lawyers in Chicago and around the country over time."

Nicolaides, who had been with his former firm for 13 years, said a "different vision of the future," as well as client conflicts, started discussions among him and his former partners about a possible separation last year.

"It was also about being able to take advantage of the opportunity to build a unique practice and different visions about how to do that," Nicolaides said.

Bates Carey Nicolaides co-founder Robert Bates said the decision for Nicolaides and others to split off was made amicably and communicated firmwide last summer. The firm, now renamed BatesCarey LLP, has about 42 lawyers following the departures, he said.

In addition to growing concerns about client conflicts between different groups within the firm, "in many respects, the question was, 'Do you feel to have a national practice you have to have offices in all these different spots?'" Bates said. "I don't think you do, but others had a difference of opinion about that."

In addition to Nicolaides, the founding partners of the new firm are Matthew Fink, Barbara Michaelides and Monica Sullivan. Thorpe will manage offices in San Francisco and Los Angeles, the firm said. Eleven of the incoming 19 partners are women, the firm noted.

The new firm's client list includes a number of large insurers, including AIG. The firm said it expects to double in size within five years.

"We are grateful for the strong partnerships we have with our clients, who have expressed enthusiasm for our new venture," Fink said. "The new firm will continue to advance aggressive advocacy and strategic problem-solving in collaboration with our clients."

--Editing by Christine Chun.

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