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New player sprouts from law firm

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Sometimes law firm split-ups are divisive and bitter.

That's not the case with the new firm of Nicolaides, Fink, Thorpe, Michaelides, Sullivan LLP. Twenty-nine of the new firm's 34 lawyers, including name partner [Richard H. Nicolaides Jr.](#), came from Bates, Carey, Nicolaides LLP.

Both Nicolaides and [Robert J. Bates Jr.](#), a partner at what's now known as BatesCarey LLP, called the split amicable.

"The idea of separation was discussed for months so there was no surprise," Nicolaides said. "We all reached the same conclusion that it made sense to go our separate ways and starting in early 2014 was a logical time to make the transition."

Nicolaides and Bates said there were issues related to conflicts presented by representing different commercial insurance company clients.

"We decided we wanted to do this in an orderly fashion because we had no real disputes over clients or who was going or staying," Bates said.

"We announced to the entire firm in July that we were going to go our separate ways at the end of the year and that made the most sense financially and businesswise."

BatesCarey now has 42 lawyers.

"This gives us the opportunity to do more with clients for which we had conflicts when the Nicolaides group was with us," Bates said.

Bates was part of two spin-off firms — Pope & John, now defunct, and the firm now known as Meckler, Bulger, Tilson, Marick & Pearson LLP.



Richard H. Nicolaides Jr.



Monica T. Sullivan



Kent M. Zimmermann

Bates said he has “no doubt the Nicolaides group will be equally successful” as BatesCarey and Meckler, Bulger, Tilson.

Kent M. Zimmermann, a law firm consultant with the Zeughauser Group, said law firm splits sometimes work out well for both firms.

BatesCarey developed a good reputation in the insurance industry and in Chicago among its peer firms, Zimmermann said.

“So, the new firm is launching from a respected platform,” he said. “The new firm will want to grow breadth and depth in the areas of practice that it wants to be known for.”

The other name partners joining Nicolaides LLP from the firm formerly known as Bates, Carey, Nicolaides are [Matthew J. Fink](#), [Barbara I. Michaelides](#) and [Monica T. Sullivan](#).

The new firm’s other name partner, Sara Thorpe, comes from Gordon & Rees LLP in San Francisco, along with two other lawyers. Another California lawyer joined Nicolaides LLP from a different firm.

Thorpe will manage the new firm’s offices in San Francisco and Los Angeles.

Nicolaides LLP also hired a new associate for its Chicago office who previously worked in New York.

The new firm represents about 15 major global insurance companies. Its clients include American International Group Ltd. (AIG), Allied World Assurance Company Holdings, Endurance Specialty Insurance Ltd. and Markel Global Insurance.

The firm’s lawyers assist insurers in evaluating insurance coverage issues and resolving coverage disputes.

“We see this as an opportunity to create and build a unique law firm,” Nicolaides said.

“What makes it unique is number one, the law firm is comprised of lawyers who focus on this specific area of the law,” he said. “And, number two, we all share a significant level of experience in dealing with these issues and working with each other.”

The new firm touts that 11 of its 19 partners are women. In addition to the three name founding partners, another eight women are partners.

“We present a unique opportunity for women in that we have a high percentage in leadership within our firm,” Sullivan said.

“We really sought out the best lawyers possible and as it turned out, we have a high percentage of women,” she said. “But we do plan to continue our focus on developing leadership skills in women through a focus on networking events and mentoring programs.”

The new firm opened its doors last week at 71 S. Wacker Drive. It is subleasing about two-thirds of the 44th floor from Mayer, Brown LLP.

Nicolaides LLP plans to grow within the next several years based on client demand and identifying lawyers that would fit in with its practice. There is no target number of lawyers or timetable for the growth.

“Our model is based on attracting and working with the most talented insurance coverage lawyers, whether they are based in Chicago or elsewhere in the United States,” Nicolaides said.

“We are not going to place a geographical limitation on our ability to attract the best lawyers to join us.”