

Insurance Defense Firm Escapes From City

New Gordon & Rees office features a dozen attorneys and a patio

By JAY STAPLETON

After years spent toiling over depositions in “traditional high-rise” law offices, veteran Connecticut litigator Dennis Brown can now take a breath of fresh air when he gets to work in the morning.

Last July, the national firm of Gordon & Rees expanded its Northeast presence by opening an office in Hartford and hiring Brown as managing partner. “At first, it was me, a paralegal and 400 boxes of legal documents,” Brown said. In the year since, a small hiring blitz has netted a dozen attorneys, plus support staffers. That, in turn, created a need for more space, so Brown has moved the operation to leafy Glastonbury.

“It’s important when you have to work hard to have the right space,” Brown said, referring to his new digs that feature large windows, yellow walls and a conference room that leads to an outdoor patio adjacent to the 148,000-square-foot office building shared with other tenants.

“This is literally a breath of fresh air after decades in traditional high rises downtown,” Brown said.

Gordon & Rees, a litigation and business transaction firm with 500 attorneys in 17 states, has been expanding rapidly in the past three years and now operates 26 offices. Founded in San Francisco in 1974, the firm’s practice areas include labor and employment, environmental/toxic tort, insurance defense, intellectual property and professional liability defense.

“The firm is really growing nationally,” Brown said. “I think there are a lot of lawyers looking for good places to work. This is a firm that prides itself on trying to be a good place to work and in treating people fairly.”

The growth of Gordon & Rees nationally “re-

fects corporate America’s shift to middle-size national firms,” Dion Cominos, the national managing partner, said in a statement. The firm has bolstered practice areas — such as insurance defense — that many larger firms have either downsized or abandoned completely.

Carlsbad, Calif.

And now, in Glastonbury, where plans ultimately call for 16 attorneys.

“Our new office was much better than anything I could find [in Hartford],” Brown said.

Brown is a veteran litigator, primarily in the



Gordon & Rees managing partner Dennis Brown, attorney Julia Ulrich Barrueco of Chartris Insurance, and Gordon & Rees senior counsel Tom Blatchley attended the open house for the firm’s new office in Glastonbury last week.

Contributed photo

Gordon & Rees first made it on the AmLaw200 ranking in 2005. This year, the firm checked in at No. 155, with \$185.5 million in revenues. That’s up 14 ranking spots from the previous year. The annual list of the top firms in gross revenue is produced by ALM, the parent company of the *Connecticut Law Tribune*.

Key Markets

In the past seven years, Gordon & Rees has expanded into a number of markets, especially increasing its footprint in the Northeast with offices in New York, New Jersey and Pennsylvania. In 2012, the firm has added new offices in Pittsburgh, Washington, D.C., St. Louis and

area of insurance defense, who spent decades working in downtown Hartford. Early in his career Brown worked for the international law firm then known as LeBoeuf, Lamb, Greene & MacRae. When Brown left in 2007, before the firm merged to become Dewey & LeBoeuf and then closed its Hartford office, he joined Edwards Angell Palmer & Dodge.

A reshuffling at that firm, when it underwent a merger and became Edwards Wildman Palmer, led to Brown deciding to hook up with Gordon & Rees.

In his long career, Brown has focused on holding down his clients’ costs. In 2007, he successfully defended a large energy company

against securities fraud and breach of contract claims in excess of \$100 million in a jury trial in federal court in Pittsburgh. Brown also defended class actions and supervised large scale claims operations in the wake of disasters such as major oil spills and petroleum facility explosions.

It was that same approach that Brown took when he started looking for a new office. “It was far more cost-effective for us to be out here,” he said. “We’re in a suburban setting and the staff doesn’t have to pay for downtown parking.”

Brown has hired attorneys from other firms that do insurance defense work, including Thomas Blatchley, who most recently worked at Halloran & Sage in Hartford for nine years.

“It’s refreshing to be in a new office of a large national firm where everyone is energized, motivated and excited by the growth of the Connecticut office and the firm generally,” Blatchley said. “It’s also refreshing to be in a location that is not a sea of asphalt, bricks and mortar. Glastonbury has all of the amenities I was accustomed to downtown, but with the added bonus of being able to look out my window and enjoy the scenery.”

Another attorney, Greil Roberts, who also handles insurance defense, was a staffer in The Hartford’s legal department. While there, he studied part time at the University of Connecticut School of Law before earning his J.D. in 2011. At The Hartford, he provided assistance on defending asbestos-related claims.

Because Gordon & Rees is also handling asbestos cases, Brown thought Roberts would be a good fit.

The new office, Roberts said, is like none he’s ever seen. “Most offices don’t have a balcony, where you can sit outside and read briefs.” ■