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Florida firm opens office with a desire to work with certain lawyers

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A Florida firm with 110 lawyers, Butler, Pappas, Wehnmuller, Katz, Craig LLP, has opened a Chicago office at 115 S. LaSalle St.

Although it's the second Florida firm to open an office in the Chicago area this summer, Butler, Pappas' managing partner, W. Douglas Berry, said, "We did not put a pin on the map and say, 'We need to move to Chicago.'"

Instead, for Butler, Pappas, the new office is a way to bring in three partners from Chicago's Clausen, Miller PC.

Those three, according to Berry, whose personalities and practices were attractive to Butler, Pappas are Susan N. K. Gummow, K. Clark Schirle, and James F. Smith.

"This is entirely driven by long-standing knowledge of the personality and character of the people involved on both sides, theirs and ours," Berry said.

He said he got to know the three through professional organizations, including the American Bar Association.

Butler, Pappas is a civil litigation defense firm that represents corporations, insurance companies and indi-

viduals. It has a major emphasis in insurance work.

Berry and Schirle are both past chairs of the Property Insurance Law Committee of the ABA's Tort, Trial & Insurance Practice Section.

Berry and Schirle "spent a lot of time together over the years," Berry said. "A natural affinity developed, and one thing led to another, and we decided to embark on an office in Chicago."

The discussions became serious about six months ago, according to Berry.

Gummow said that at Clausen, Miller, "Clark and I worked together, Jim (Smith) and I worked together. When this opportunity arose, we were all very excited about it, and things just fell into place."

In Gummow's general business practice, including bankruptcy, litigation and insurance law, she said she has a niche practice representing insurance carriers whose insured clients have bankruptcy issues.

The current economy has led to considerable need for this experience nationwide, she said. Gummow is the author of the "Bankruptcy and Insurance Law Manual," published by the American

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Bankruptcy Institute.

Schirle has 20 years' experience in litigation of large, complex, multimillion-dollar, first-party property disputes primarily in the Midwest, but also around the country, according to Schirle and his new firm.

Smith concentrates in commercial disputes, intellectual property matters and corporate counseling and has also litigated on behalf of insurance companies in a variety of ways, primarily in the Midwest, according to his colleagues. He has practiced in subrogation matters, legal malpractice, directors' and officers' liability and casualty defense as well as in computer misuse matters and Internet-related disputes.

Since Butler, Pappas' new office opened here on June 3, two other Clausen, Miller lawyers have joined as of counsel, Lawrence R. Drummond and Joshua A. Aldort, according to Gummow.

Butler, Pappas has three offices in Florida, one in Charlotte, N.C., and one in

Mobile, Ala. Berry said the firm has "historically for over 30 years been a very conservative firm in Florida. We approach growth conservatively."

"I think we had very few matters outside the Southeast before we made this decision," he added.

But Gummow said, "Just the opening of an office in this type of economy demonstrates the success of the management of Butler, Pappas and the direction of the firm."

Berry is a retired lieutenant colonel in the Marine Corps. Smith is a brigadier general in the U.S. Air Force Reserve. Berry said the law firm has at least six other lawyers who were formerly in the military. "If I see that on a resume, I'll give it a second look," he said.

The other Florida-based firm to open here this year is Zumpano, Patricios & Winker PA., which opened an office in Skokie.

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