

# The Legal Intelligence

## Klehr Harrison Looks to Bolster Bankruptcy Practice

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In a volatile economy, business law firm Klehr Harrison Harvey Branzburg & Ellers has seized on what it sees as an opportunity.

The 99-attorney firm has hired a partner, an of counsel and an associate to fill out its bankruptcy practice.

"Given these economic times we had a need for additional people who are very talented in this area and when the opportunity presented itself, we grabbed them," said the firm's founding member and co-chairman of its debtor-creditor & insolvency department, Morton R. Branzburg.

The firm added partner Linda Richenderfer, who was formerly a partner at 12-attorney Delaware firm Bifferato Gentilotti and before that at Saul Ewing, to its Wilmington office.

Richenderfer's practice focuses on Chapter 11 and Chapter 7 matters as well as complex commercial disputes and toxic tort litigation.

In addition to her Delaware practice, she will represent clients in Pennsylvania litigation.

Associate Jennifer Patone Cook came to the firm's Delaware office with Richenderfer from Bifferato Gentilotti and will concentrate on Chapter 11 and Chapter 7 bankruptcy cases.

The firm also brought aboard Leona Mogavero, who, prior to going in-house, was a partner at Wolf Block. Mogavero is of counsel in the Philadelphia office and focuses her practice on creditors' rights and bankruptcy.

Branzburg said the firm hired Richenderfer, Mogavero and Cook because "they have significant depth and breadth of experience in bankruptcy and bankruptcy litigation and workouts and restructures."

"Those are the areas in high demand," he said.

And, while Bifferato Gentilotti is arguably better known for its plaintiffs work than its bankruptcy work, Branzburg said the firm was impressed with Richenderfer's and Cook's individual bankruptcy backgrounds.

"Linda did a lot of bankruptcy litigation at Saul Ewing and Jennifer Cook worked in the bankruptcy court, so they're no novices to the bankruptcy practice," he said, adding that Richenderfer had previously worked at Saul Ewing with Klehr Harrison partner Domenic E. Pacitti, a bankruptcy attorney in the firm's Wilmington office.

Steven Kruza of Kruza Legal Search said the bankruptcy law boom is in full swing.

"I think there's been an anticipation that bankruptcy would pick up for quite awhile and I'd say over the past couple of months that increase in bankruptcy activity has been realized," he said.

When asked to assign a value to the new hires' combined client book, Branzburg declined but said, "They each had a following."

But he added that because she was a partner at a law firm directly before joining Klehr Harrison, Richenderfer was the only one whose client base was considered in the firm's decision to hire.

"Certainly that's a factor in our decision-making, but what's more important is the depth and breadth of the talent," Branzburg said.

Branzburg said the firm continues actively seeking lawyers for its bankruptcy and litigation practices because "there's a tremendous demand for our services in those areas."

He said the firm's bankruptcy practice has seen continually increasing business since the first quarter, and he doesn't expect it to let up in the near future.

"Every indication is that there will continue to be a strong demand for services in the debtor-creditor area," he said.

Kruza said he feels the bankruptcy trend is one worth jumping on because it probably won't be slowing down any time soon.

That said, Kruza warned firms to be conscious of the fact that it eventually will.

"The only thing to be a little concerned with long term is that bankruptcy tends to be cyclical and firms certainly don't want to overhire in that area," he said. "I think it's certainly a good idea for law firms that have a capability in that area to bolster their ranks, continue to develop that business and to take advantage of [the current trend]."

Kruza said it's a good idea for firms to add staff in Delaware because there is so much filing activity there.

"We're at a time right now where firms are certainly very conscious of their growth, of where they're hiring, and of where they're spending money," he said. "If there's an area of growth for firms of this region, I would say it's really all about bankruptcy."

Ian Connor Bifferato, managing partner of Bifferato Gentilotti, could not be reached for comment at press time.

Richenderfer was unavailable for comment at press time. •

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