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Cohen Seglias Plans to Merge With Six-Lawyer New York Firm

BY ZACK NEEDLES

Of the Legal Staff

Philadelphia-based Cohen Seglias Pallas Greenhall & Furman has announced plans to merge with six-lawyer, New York City-based construction law boutique Georgoulis & Associates, effective January 1.

The addition will bring Cohen Seglias' headcount up from 53 to 59 attorneys and will give the firm its first New York office.

Chris Georgoulis, founding member of Georgoulis & Associates, will join Cohen Seglias as managing partner of the office.

Joyce Sun and Michael McDermott, both formerly senior associates with Georgoulis & Associates, will join Cohen Seglias as partners.

In addition, Monica Barron, Peter Plevritis and James Lainas, all former associates at Georgoulis & Associates, will join Cohen Seglias as associates.

Jason A. Copley, managing partner of Cohen Seglias, said that while the firm in recent years has put increased emphasis on expanding its non-construction practices, it has remained open to growth opportunities in construction as well.

According to Copley, Georgoulis & Associates, which represents owners, contractors, subcontractors, construction managers, architects, engineers and sureties in both private and public construction and real estate matters, does "precisely the same type of work our construction department does."

Copley said the merger with Georgoulis & Associates serves to secure the Cohen Seglias' foothold in New York, where it already does some work.

According to Copley, Cohen Seglias' crossover into New York has been facilitated by the increasing amount of work the firm has done in Northern New Jersey over the past five years or so.

"We always had a little bit of work up North, but we've been able to accelerate that," Copley said, noting that the firm's office in Iselin, N.J., as well as its association



Jason A. Copley

with several trade organizations in the region, have given it the momentum it needed to make the leap into the New York market.

Copley said that while his firm saw a marked decrease in construction activity among its clients in recent years because of the recession, its construction attorneys actually experienced an uptick in legal work during that period.

As existing construction projects stalled out due to lack of funds, the role of the construction lawyer became even more important during the economic downturn, Copley said.

"There was definitely more turmoil, which increased the need for our services," Copley said.

By joining forces with Georgoulis & Associates, Copley said, Cohen Seglias hopes to be able to garner a bigger portion of New York's huge construction market than either firm might have been able to on its own.

"There's always significant work in that town," Copley said, explaining that while Georgoulis & Associates was only able to handle a small portion of that work as a six-member shop, it will now have Cohen Seglias' 35 additional construction lawyers to support it.

Copley noted that the recent building and infrastructure damage caused by Hurricane Sandy will likely result in even more potential construction work in the already active New York market.

Georgoulis & Associates marks the second construction boutique Cohen

Seglias has picked up this year.

In April, the firm brought aboard two-member construction law and litigation firm Byler & Blaker to its Philadelphia office.

Anthony L. Byler, who was the managing partner of Byler & Blaker and who had worked for Cohen Seglias as an associate until 2000, rejoined the firm as a partner in its construction practice. Byler represents public and private owners, contractors, subcontractors and others in construction litigation.

Copley said that when it comes to merging with construction practices, his firm is always on the lookout for mergers that are devoid of conflicts, noting that Cohen Seglias has had to pass on several opportunities over the years for this reason.

According to Copley, Cohen Seglias and Georgoulis & Associates do not have any common clients so material conflicts were not an issue.

The two firms do, however, have relationships with some of the same potential clients, which Cohen Seglias hopes will result in additional business, Copley said.

While the firm made significant strides toward bulking up its construction practice in 2012, Copley said it remains committed to its other practice areas as well, which include federal contracting, real estate, labor and employment, commercial litigation, insurance coverage and risk management, transactional, wealth preservation, creditors rights, bankruptcy and restructuring, health care, nonprofit and e-discovery law.

Copley said the firm has several new hires lined up in its non-construction practices, which it plans to announce in the new year.

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