

White-Collar Crime Lawyer Leaves DLA For Boutique

By Jonathan Vanian

Daily Journal Staff Writer

Sacramento-based Stevens & O'Connell may be a small shop, but its top-notch reputation was enough to lure a leading litigator from big firm life.

Matt Jacobs, the former head of DLA Piper's Sacramento litigation group, joined the boutique last week, taking with him associates Alex Medina and Dan Croxall. The firm changed its name to Stevens, O'Connell & Jacobs.

The now 11-lawyer boutique has three name partners with ties to the U.S. attorney's office in Sacramento. Co-founders George L. O'Connell and Charles J. Stevens are former federal prosecutors and Jacobs was first assistant U.S. attorney in the same office.

With the addition of Jacobs, O'Connell said, the firm can continue to compete with big firms on high-profile government investigation cases and both white-collar criminal and complex business litigation work.

Some of the big matters the firm has been involved with include defending Hewlett Packard on a whistle-blower case in Idaho, representing witnesses involved with the Enron scandal, and defending California Senate President Pro Tem Don Perata in a federal investigation over public corruption charges.

Matthew D. Feuer, a legal recruiter with McClure & Feuer, said although the firm is based in Sacramento, the lawyers' reputations as former U.S. attorneys have allowed them to pick up major litigation cases elsewhere.

"We don't view ourselves as strictly seeking, or competing, in the Sacramento legal market," O'Connell said. "We view ourselves as competing for getting business in Northern California."

Jacobs said he had no intention of leaving DLA Piper for another firm, but decided to make the jump, in part, because a smaller firm with hundreds of clients presented his practice with far fewer conflicts of interests than a mega-firm with thousands.

Although Jacobs admits switching from big law to a boutique is "a little bit scary," he said the fact he has known both Stevens and O'Connell for so long and respects their lawyering gave him confidence that he made the right decision.

"The idea that I would walk down the hallway and turn to any of my colleagues - each of whom I know could step up and do top-rate work without me having to nurse them along - was probably the biggest attraction," Jacobs said.

"Matt is a wonderful lawyer and was a great colleague and friend and we're going to miss him," said Gilles S. Attia, managing partner of DLA Piper's Sacramento office.

DLA Piper is in the process of finding a replacement for Jacobs' role as head of the Sacramento litigation group, Attia added.