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What 2024 Looked Like For 4 Small Firms

By **Rachel Rippetoe**

Law360 (December 23, 2024, 2:07 PM EST) -- A lot can happen in a year, especially for small law firms. For freshly minted practices, that first or second year of business can make or break a firm. But even for decades-old shops, the law practice continues to evolve as it passes between generations.

Law360 Pulse spoke with the leaders of four firms, some just getting started and others with long legacies, about what their 2024 looked like.



Kevin Russell and Daniel Woofter

Russell & Woofter LLC

D.C. appellate lawyers Kevin Russell and Daniel Woofter started their own practice last year after their longtime partner and U.S. Supreme Court legend Tom Goldstein, who also runs SCOTUSblog, retired. Goldstein **told Law360 Pulse** at the time that his retirement was in part prompted by the "aggressive, strong-willed and purposeful" makeup of the U.S. Supreme Court.

"The little guy, in things that matter at the Supreme Court, is pretty much going to lose," he said in March 2023.

But in their first year on their own, Russell and Woofter said their work, largely representing plaintiffs in matters before the circuit courts of appeal and the Supreme Court, has not been so bleak. The pair have managed to rack up several big wins.

"A lot of these cases are not political left versus right," Russell said. "Even though we tend to represent the littler guy, plaintiffs and the like, who probably have a tougher time with conservatives than they do with liberals, we still are able to tailor our arguments in ways that make them sympathetic to conservative justices."

Just last month, Russell prevailed for investors as the Supreme Court reversed its decision to hear an appeal in Facebook v. Amalgamated Bank, a case tied to the Cambridge Analytica scandal.

The terse ruling dismissing Meta's writ of certiorari as "improvidently granted" came after oral arguments on Nov. 8 over whether a company earnings report, which had not specifically detailed the user data harvested in the Cambridge Analytica scandal when it brought up potential security risks, had been misleading to investors. Among other things, Russell argued that the question presented to the court around when to disclose past events in risk disclosures to investors was not actually pertinent to the underlying case.

"It was a particularly gratifying outcome, because I was very puzzled about why the court had taken the case in the first place, and it seemed they regretted that decision in the end," Russell said.

Also last month, Woofter argued before the Sixth Circuit on behalf of several intervenors fighting to preserve the Federal Communications Commission's net neutrality rules and broadband authority.

Both Woofter and Russell said they have been pleasantly surprised by how busy they were in their first full year running their own firm. They've continued to do the work they did with Goldstein, they said, although they said it's true that appellate decisions around more hot-button issues like abortion, affirmative action or criminal justice are more likely to be "preordained." Russell said he sometimes stays away from them for that reason.

"We are much more selective in the pro bono cases because, particularly in this court, we're not doing anybody any good filing hopeless cert petitions or taking up issues that not only are you not going to win for the client, but you may create bad law for other folks," he said. "So we're very careful and thoughtful about that."



E. Danya Perry

Perry Law

This year was also Danya Perry's first full year of running her new litigation firm. The former prosecutor started Perry Law in June 2023 with an ambitious vision to recruit top legal talent with BigLaw-beating salaries and become a heavyweight on both the plaintiffs and the defense side. She said 2024 showed she's on track to meet those goals.

Since its inception, the firm has tripled in size, now with 15 full-time attorneys. And at the start of this year, Perry made good on her promise to pay associates above market rate, announcing in December last year that she'd start the year paying associates a minimum of \$230,000 and up to \$440,000 for more senior associates, well above the Cravath Swaine & Moore LLP scale.

"We did that in our first year and we are intending to do that for this coming year as well," Perry said. "You recruit the right people, you pay them what they deserve, and they really step up."

In terms of the work itself, Perry said that while the firm has already had a number of high-profile wins, she's perhaps most proud that over 20% of the firm's caseload this year was pro bono work. In particular, she said they've done a lot of "pro-democracy" and election integrity work, including writing amicus briefs for the States United Democracy Center.

Among the high-profile clients the firm has represented this year, from ex-Apollo Global Management CEO **Leon Black** to Guns N' Roses lead singer **Axl Rose**, likely Perry's most prominent achievement this year was representing Michael Cohen, the one-time personal attorney to President-elect Donald Trump, as he served as a star witness in Trump's hush-money trial in New York. A jury eventually found Trump guilty of 34 felonies over a plot to illegally sway the 2016 election by making payments to cover up an extramarital affair. She said both she and her client felt they had contributed to the verdict, which came down in May.

The firm also litigated against former New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo this year, representing a former aide who had accused him of sexual harassment and who became the **indirect target** of a number of motions and subpoenas in a separate sexual harassment suit an anonymous New York state trooper filed against Cuomo.

"We take on powerful people," Perry said. "From the start, we were kind of punching above our weight, but I think very quickly we proved ourselves as winners."



Rob Vartabedian

Vartabedian Hester & Haynes

It hadn't even been a year since Rob Vartabedian, Conrad Hester and Craig Haynes founded their Texas oil and gas boutique when the firm made headlines for being **the first to match** the Milbank LLP year-end bonus scale in November.

"It was more than a goal. It was a promise that we made to the associates, so I felt like we had to do it," Vartabedian said. "The question was, how painful was it going to be? And it wasn't that painful, because we didn't have a bad month all year."

The attorneys told Law360 Pulse **in February** that they broke off from BigLaw firms Alston & Bird LLP and Holland & Knight LLP and founded Vartabedian Hester & Haynes LLP largely to stop client conflicts from hampering engagement opportunities. Now having reached the end of their first year in practice, Vartabedian said that choice is feeling like the right one.

"There were, I would say, probably a dozen cases that we've worked on this year that we would have had to turn down on conflicts at prior firms," he said. "We had success in three different contingency

matters in 2024, and I believe two of those would have been cases that we would have needed to turn down."

Those successes led the firm to its first major milestone, Vartabedian said: becoming profitable. It happened in April, less than three months in, he said.

"It's scary to start a firm where you have a few months of lots of expenses and no revenue," he said. "So the fact that we were in the black by April was great. We had all assumed we were going to be operating in the red until mid- to late summer."

The firm prevailed in both of its two trials this year, Vartabedian said. One was a short trial for attorney fees on a case they had already won on summary judgment, and the other was a weeklong trial in Fort Worth, in which the firm represented a subsidiary of Devon Energy in a dispute over royalty payments.

"So it was nice to get off to a good start in that regard," Vartabedian said. "I remember hearing in the 1990s that the oil and gas industry had, you know, 10 years left tops, and people keep being wrong about that. I think the oil and gas litigation practice is thriving, particularly in Texas right now, and it's going to continue to thrive for the foreseeable future."





Joseph Cammarata and Allan Siegel

Chaikin Sherman Cammarata & Siegel PC

Different from the excitement of marking the first full year running one's own law firm, the more than 50-year-old D.C. personal injury firm Sherman Cammarata Siegel PC celebrated a different kind of milestone in 2024. All its lead partners celebrated major anniversaries practicing law. Managing partner Ira Sherman celebrated his 50th year as a lawyer, Joseph Cammarata his 40th, and Allan Siegel his 30th.

"I think it's really interesting that our decades of practice in law coincide," Siegel said. "All are obviously significant milestones, and it just demonstrates how, especially in small law firms, there's a huge benefit to having a generational gap between the partners, because it allows us to evolve over the years and continue to provide great legal work and have the tradition continue for many years in the future."

Just because all three men have been in practice for a long time doesn't mean their pace of success has slowed. This year, Siegel was named trial lawyer of the year by The Trial Lawyers Association of Metropolitan D.C. And the firm brought in a number of major settlements for clients.

One notable win for Cammarata was a very large settlement with a tractor-trailer company he secured on behalf of victims of a crash that killed one woman and badly injured a man. While the trailer company had a very limited amount of insurance, Cammarata said the firm's aggressive litigation led to a deal in which, on top of the company's contribution, the owners of the company contributed personally to the settlement.

And in a big win for Siegel, he represented a cyclist who suffered a brain injury after hitting a mound

of asphalt on a roadway in Washington, D.C. The firm helped the cyclist sue the district for failing to maintain the road properly, and to secure a settlement despite what Siegel said were long odds.

"To prove these kinds of cases is very difficult in any jurisdiction because you have to prove that the city, the municipality, knew or should have known of the defect on the roadway," Siegel said. "And obviously a roadway is in the public and anybody has access."

Along with the anniversaries and wins, 2024 also brought a big addition to the firm: the promotion of associate Stephen Ollar to partner, bringing the firm's long-standing partner count from three to four. In line with the existing intervals in the partners' years of experience, Siegel said Ollar is about 10 years his junior. The hope is that Ollar will be celebrating the same milestones in the years to come, they said.

"The tradition of the law firm is as the older ones leave, the younger ones take over, and so if as people retire or take a lesser role, the young people have a more significant role, and so that's been the philosophy," Cammarata said.

--Editing by Haylee Pearl.

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