

[HOME](#) > [Daily Litigation](#)

Q&A

How Texas Boutique With BigLaw Roots Grew In Its 1st Year

By [Lynn LaRowe](#) | 2025-02-27 15:27:53 -0500 · [Listen to article](#)

Since launching about a year ago, Texas litigation boutique [Vartabedian Hester & Haynes LLP](#) has doubled its headcount, stretched beyond its initial focus on oil and gas work, and encouraged associates to make "entrepreneurial pitches" by reducing their billable hour requirement, while also matching [Milbank LLP](#)'s year-end bonus scale.

Even the ping pong table in the firm's Fort Worth shop had to be folded up to make room for new offices, according to Conrad Hester, a founder and managing partner of the firm.



Conrad Hester

"We have doubled our headcount, doubled our client base," Hester said. "I'm excited to talk about it. It's been a great year."

Vartabedian Hester, which was [originally launched](#) by BigLaw oil and gas attorneys from [Alston & Bird LLP](#) and [Holland & Knight LLP](#), has grown to 24 attorneys, most recently by [adding a seven-lawyer bankruptcy team](#) in Fort Worth through a merger with Forshey Prostok LLP, including that firm's two co-founders.

The firm also has a Dallas location and is planning to move into a larger space in Fort Worth this summer, Hester said.

Law360 Pulse recently sat down with Hester to talk about the firm's first year and what lies ahead for the Texas-based operation. The responses have been edited for length and clarity.

Can you talk about the firm's growth since its founding and the strategies behind a successful first year?

We have moved beyond our beginnings of primarily being focused on oil and gas litigation to having different litigation practices.

I think our shift from just oil and gas goes back to why we started this firm in the first place. When we started this firm, we wanted to hang on to a lot of the things that we felt really worked well at our BigLaw firms, like the level of client service and high-level lawyering, but we wanted to have the kind of agility that comes with being a smaller firm.

We have been able to take on more matters because we're not butting our heads against conflicts, as can happen frequently at a large firm. We've been able to take on insurance and indemnity matters, which can be hard at a large firm, because somebody in the firm might represent a company at issue. Last year, we brought on Shelley Glazer, who has a robust insurance and indemnity practice.

We've also been able to offer alternative fee arrangements in partnership with our clients, and have had a few contingency matters that worked out favorably in our first year. We've had clients that really like that and are aligned with an AFA. It gives a lot of upside, and it certainly incentivizes us to accomplish the client's goals efficiently.

Our commercial litigation group is involved in class actions in partnership with the [Lanier Law Firm](#) challenging a model for commercial parking lots that charge exorbitant fees or fines. We brought on Daniella Main last year from Alston & Bird, and she is working on those matters and others.

We just brought on a restructuring team [through a merger with Forshey Prostok LLP]. We had been in discussions with Jeff Prostok and Robert Forshey for a while, having worked with them on other matters, and their outlook on delivering excellent client service really matched ours. This seemed like a natural growth area for us.

We are transitioning from just oil and gas litigation to becoming more multidimensional when it comes to the offerings we have but all within that litigation umbrella. We have matters spinning

off our practice groups that involve other industries, so it made sense for us to be full service in litigation. We have some other prospects in the works right now, as well.

How is the firm recruiting associates?

One of the things that has brought me a lot of delight is that we've been able to roll out a kind of different structure for our associates. We want to pay them top of market but also provide them more opportunities.

We have reduced the billable hour requirement for them to 1,800, which is lower than BigLaw, but we are paying them top of market. We were the first to [match Milbank's bonus scale](#). We are able to reduce the rates they charge, so our associates are better positioned to make entrepreneurial pitches. It's difficult as an associate to develop work when you're straddled with an extraordinarily high rate that could be higher than a 30-year partner's rate at another firm.

We really want to give our associates the resources they need to flourish.

We're also looking forward to our second year of summer associates and will be up to three this year. We have a returnee who was a 1L with us last year who is at Harvard [Law School] and a couple of others will be joining us from Texas Tech [University School of Law].

We're excited about getting our associates right out of law school. It is absolutely true that as one of only a few summer associates, you get to do a lot more, we have a lot of hands-on experience that we can offer.

Have you run into any challenges you didn't expect in your first year, and what are your hopes for the firm's second year?

In the very early days of putting this together, I got a little bleary-eyed with some of the administrative work, like putting together a 401K for the group. Some of those things were a little outside my wheelhouse. So we brought on a very competent firm administrator, Fernando Giannazzo. I am very glad that we did, he has taken a lot of items off my plate.

We are interested in building an investigations practice, we've been looking at labor and employment and maybe some [SEC](#) work, as well. I think those areas would be natural for our firm. We hope to grow strategically, for what makes sense for our firm, not for the numbers.

It's been one year, and we've gone from 12 attorneys to 24. We're looking forward to another

great year.

--Editing by Nicole Bleier.

For a reprint of this article, please contact reprints@law360.com.

0 Comments

Your name will appear next to your comment. If you do not disclose your full name, your comment will be deleted. Your email address will not be visible to the public.

[Terms of Service](#)

Tell us what you think (1,500 characters max)