

Ohio's Porter Wright Enters Chicago Via Merger With 17-Lawyer Firm

The Am Law 200 firm, through the merger, has opened its eighth location in a strategy to focus on mid-market legal services in the Midwest.

By Roy Strom
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Columbus, Ohio-based Porter Wright Morris & Arthur has entered the Chicago legal market thanks to a merger with 17-lawyer Butler Rubin Saltarelli & Boyd, the firms announced Thursday.

For Porter Wright, an Am Law 200 firm that brought in \$110.5 million in revenue in 2017, the opening of its eighth office is part of a strategy to provide the full range of legal services to mid-market companies throughout the Midwest, the firm's managing partner Robert Tannous said in an interview. The merger took effect Friday.

In 2017, 190-lawyer Porter Wright followed its Midwest expansion plan into Pittsburgh, where the firm now has 14 lawyers. The more recent expansion is also an attempt to buck the firm's dwindling head count and stagnant revenue. In 2008, the firm's 251 lawyers brought in \$121.5 million in gross revenue, according to data from ALM Intelligence.

"Our growth plan has really been to focus on the Midwest, and we've always looked at Chicago as a place we wanted to move into," Tannous said. "It



Photo: Cittings Photography

Firm leaders of Porter Wright Morris & Arthur and Butler Rubin Saltarelli & Boyd signing a combination agreement.

was a place we felt would help us expand our brand and opportunities. This is a culmination of a plan we've been looking at for quite some time."

Butler Rubin was founded in 1980 by a breakaway group of four partners from Winston & Strawn and has since focused on complex financial industry litigation and insurance litigation. Its work has swung from cases involving the savings and loan crisis of the 1980s, the Enron Corp. scandal, asbestos, mort-

gage-backed securities fraud and, more recently, opioid tort claims.

Prior to the merger, the firm had been in the market to add lateral partners, Robert Hermes, its managing partner said in an interview. The firm's founding partners had all retired by the end of 2017, Hermes said. Butler Rubin and Porter Wright were introduced by Major, Lindsey & Africa, which both firms had retained individually, Tannous and Hermes said.

"I was impressed with the fact that Porter Wright had a good vision of itself," Hermes said. "They really perceive the firm and want to grow the firm to become the law firm for mid-market companies in the Midwest. And that, to me, is a real concept. That is a real idea. And the economic capital of the Midwest is Chicago, so they need to be here to do that."

Tannous said Butler Rubin was an attractive fit for Porter Wright because its litigation practice will be a new capability to offer the firm's existing clients.

Porter Wright's ERISA group would be particularly well fit in cross-selling Butler Rubin's litigation practice, Hermes said. Butler Rubin doesn't offer that practice, but its financial services clients could be in the market for it, Hermes said.

"Our practice areas are mutually exclusive of each other, so it's a nice fit," Tannous said. "We give them a much deeper, bigger platform. They give us a new practice area where they are internationally known. It gives us a platform to grow our client base and provide additional services to our existing clients."

*Based in Chicago, **Roy Strom** has been reporting on the legal world since 2011. He covers law firms with a focus on how the Big Law business model is changing. He writes a weekly column for Law.com called "The Law Firm Disrupted," covering changes in the legal services market. He can be reached at rstrom@alm.com. On Twitter: @RoyWStrom*