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Ohio law firm opens Tampa office with talent swiped from local competitor



Bob Tannous, managing partner
at Porter Wright

porterwright

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An out-of-state law firm is breaking into the Tampa Bay market with a team of attorneys it recruited from a nearby competitor.

Columbus, Ohio-based Porter Wright Morris & Arthur recruited a litigation team of five attorneys from Freeborn

& Peters, a Chicago-based firm that's been in the region since 2017.

Porter Wright's plans to open an office in Tampa follow just one week after Freeborn announced plans to merge with Atlanta-based Smith Gambrell & Russell.

The timing aligned for all parties involved, Porter Wright Managing Director Bob Tannous told the Tampa Bay Business Journal. Tannous has a long history with one of the attorneys, Michael Kelly, and said both wanted to seize the chance to work together when the opportunity arose.

Freeborn's former managing partner in Tampa, Larry Ingram, will serve as partner-in-charge for Porter Wright in Tampa, while Jessica Alley, Christina Flatau, Melissa Murphy, and Michael Kelly, who will split his time between Porter Wright's offices in Chicago and Tampa, are joining as partners.

Porter Wright's Tampa office will specialize in complex commercial litigation broadly, including insurance brokerage counseling and litigation, reinsurance, and restrictive covenants, according to the firm. Tannous says the goal is to eventually build out the firm's full service offerings here.

Founded in Columbus, Ohio, Porter Wright has had a presence in Florida an office in Naples since 1987. The firm, which is the second-largest in central Ohio, has 180 attorneys across nine offices in Columbus, Cincinnati, Cleveland, Dayton, Washington, D.C., Chicago, Pittsburgh, Naples, and, now, Tampa.

Proximity to talent played a major role in Porter Wright's decision to open an office here, Tannous said. With individuals and businesses from the Midwest flocking to Tampa Bay in droves, "it just made a lot of sense for us to plant a flag there," he said.