

Bickel & Brewer Alums Launch Dallas Litigation Boutique

By Jess Davis

Law360, Dallas (August 04, 2014, 7:48 PM ET) -- Two former Bickel & Brewer LLP partners have formed Gardner Haas PLLC, a Dallas-based boutique commercial litigation firm with a national scope and a specialty in hospitality work, the firm announced Monday.

Celebrating its “coming out party” after launching with a soft opening at the beginning of 2014, Gardner Haas founders Michael Gardner and Eric Haas say the firm has surpassed their expectations and beaten internal markers. Gardner was one of only five equity partners at Bickel & Brewer when he left with Haas and an associate to bring to life an idea that had been brewing for years — to take the best of what they’d learned working at Bickel & Brewer and build on that foundation with improved efficiency and a high bar for client service.

“We had conversations on a daily basis about how to practice law and do better at what we were doing every day,” Gardner says of working with Haas. “It was a long time coming.”

And though they knew it was a risk to strike out on their own, Haas says as the idea evolved over time, their excitement grew exponentially and eventually “so far outweighed the risk that it was really a no-brainer when we got down to it.”

Relying heavily on technology to make the practice efficient, Gardner Haas also outsources work that doesn’t need to be done by attorneys and that the firm doesn’t need to hire full-time staff to execute, helping keep overhead — and hourly billing rates — low, Haas says. The firm also fully embraces alternative fee arrangements, working with clients to develop hybrid billing agreements and taking some promising cases on a contingency basis, acting as a partner with the client when their interests align.

The firm has a general commercial litigation practice, working with small and medium-sized corporations, entrepreneurs, directors and officers of major corporations, private equity funds and portfolio companies of those funds. It has an emerging specialty in hospitality work, representing both major and independent hotel operators, hotel owners and developers.



Michael Gardner



Eric Haas

Building on the national trial experience both partners gained from a combined 26 years at Bickel & Brewer, along with experience in international arbitrations, Gardner Haas isn't solely a Texas firm, but a boutique with reach across the country, the partners say. They're experienced in hospitality, bankruptcy, environmental, securities, intellectual property, trade secrets, oil and gas, labor and employment, insurance, real estate, antitrust and white collar criminal defense matters.

Gardner says the firm does plan to grow, but wants to stay below 25 lawyers — a sweet spot he and Haas think will allow the firm to maintain efficiencies and the collaborative ethos that helps the firm tackle sophisticated, complex litigation.

“Our goal is to grow but we don't want to get to a size that would preclude our nimbleness and agility we're enjoying right now,” he says. “We don't want to get large enough that it slows us down or makes us less responsive, and we want to maintain the quality of the work product going out the door. Time will tell what size makes sense.”

And as the firm finds its footing in an increasingly competitive Texas market, Haas says its attention to client service and ability to help clients make business decisions about their litigation goals will help it stand out. The firm doesn't just talk with clients about what they could do and what their options are, but strives to help them figure out what they should be doing, Gardner says. That targeted focus produces bottom-line results that make sense for its clients, he says.

“This is a deep legal market in Dallas with a lot of good law firms out there and talented lawyers that people could choose from,” Gardner says. “We understand how competitive the market is. We believe strongly when we speak to our clients — both before they hire us and after they hire us — that they feel like there's a real value proposition in going with Gardner Haas.”

--Editing by Mark Lebetkin.