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Gutted by partner departures, Sher Leff fills the holes

Two more attorneys leave the San Francisco plaintiffs' firm for their own shop, while Sher Leff is promoting from within.

By David Ruiz

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SAN FRANCISCO - After losing its two core partners and one associate this summer, San Francisco plaintiffs' firm Sher Leff LLP has filled the gaps by elevating its two remaining associates to partner.

The latest departure came last week, when partner Todd E. Robins and associate Jed J. Borghei officially opened their own firm in San Francisco, Robins Borghei LLP. Like before, the lawyers focus their practice on water contamination litigation.

Last month, star litigator and partner Jessica L. Grant joined Coblenz, Patch, Duffy & Bass LLP.

Five attorneys remain at the firm, including the two name partners, Victor M. Sher and Alexander Leff, according to its website. The firm promoted Krishna Juvvadi and Esther Klisura from associate to partner, according to the site. One other staff attorney also practices at the firm. Sher retired from practice but continues to serve as an adviser to the firm; he also serves on the boards of several environmental groups. Leff, meanwhile, serves as an administrative partner and financier for the operation, but does not practice law. Neither Leff nor Sher could be reached for comment.

Sher Leff's latest big case concluded in April, when Grant led the firm's lawyers to a win in New Hampshire state court on behalf of the state of New Hampshire against Exxon Mobil Corp. and other major oil companies over their role in polluting the state's water supply through the use of the gasoline additive MTBE. The firm won a jury verdict of \$816 million in damages against the companies, of which Exxon was found liable for \$236 million.

Robins said his new firm has been in the planning process for a few months.

“Our mission at the new firm is to continue doing the same work,” Robins said. “It's a very important area with very rewarding work, and there's plenty of it to do.”

During his 10 years at Sher Leff, Robins litigated a number of cases involving the chemical compound 1,2,3-Trichloropropane (TCP), an industrial solvent regulated by the state of California - the only state to do so. He said he's optimistic his new firm will bring over some of his previous clients, although it was too early to tell which ones. Previous clients include the Hawaii Water Service Co., California Water Service Co. and the California cities of Oceanside, Livingston, Shafter and Tulare.

Robins said his firm will expand its capacity through a partnership with San Luis Obispo-based business law firm Adamski Moroski Madden Cumberland & Green LLP. The name partners of that firm will spend part of their time on cases led by Robins Borghei, he said.

“We're thrilled about the new venture,” Robins said. “We think the matchup with our new partners is perfect and gives every tool we need on the strongest possible platform.”