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Client Demand, Geographic Convenience Spurs New Weber Gallagher Office in Chicago



The Philadelphia-based firm's combination with insurance boutique Novak Law comes after three Am Law 200 firms have already moved into or grown in Chicago via mergers so far in 2023.



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Insurance Litigation

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What You Need to Know

- Weber Gallagher has opened an office in Chicago following increased client demand in the region.
- In order to open the office, the firm absorbed insurance boutique Novak Law, which expects to bring its clients along in the move.
- Neal Novak, founder of Novak Law, expressed some trepidation about joining a large firm, yet considered Weber Gallagher.

Philadelphia-based Weber Gallagher Simpson Stapleton Fires & Newby has opened its first office in Chicago, absorbing insurance boutique Novak Law in order to respond to a regional increase in client demand.

“Our clients over the course of time tell us where they see demand, and the Midwest was one of those areas,” said Weber Gallagher chair Andrew Indeck. “In the insurance world, [clients] are looking for more bench strength and geographical presence.”

Weber Gallagher may not be the only firm to see this increased demand in the Chicago area and across the Midwest. Neal Novak, founder of Novak Law and newly designated partner in Weber Gallagher’s insurance practice, expressed surprise at how quickly firms are moving into the city, although he also took note of Chicago’s geographic convenience for attorneys traveling to meet clients.

“You can get on your plane in Chicago and go anywhere in the United States and be back on the same day,” he observed.

Already in 2023, three Am Law 200 firms—[Nelson Mullins Riley & Scarborough](#), [Armstrong Teasdale](#) and [Smith, Gambrell & Russell](#)—have either moved into Chicago or grown in the city via mergers.

Yet Weber Gallagher absorbed Novak’s firm for reasons beyond its location. According to Indeck, the firm is looking to expand its overall offerings to its current clients. Novak, along with partner Colleen Costello, brought with them “skill sets [the firm] just didn’t have, along with their “strong presence in the London [insurance] market” and their experiences handling disability insurance claims.

“They have some skills that we don’t that we can market to our clients,” said Indeck. “[It made] a great, natural, synergistic sense to bring [our] groups together.”

Novak and Costello saw a similar opportunity for service expansion when they decided to join Weber Gallagher.

“One of the best parts of this deal for us is the change...in terms of the depth and resources we [can] offer our clients,” Novak said.

However, Novak was not without his reservations about joining a larger law firm. Prior to opening Novak Law just over thirty years ago, Novak said he previously worked for a large firm.

“I wanted to be careful about joining a large firm again,” he said, mentioning, among other concerns, his dislike of “corporate structures that people have to adhere to regardless of anything else.”

“You can’t be an individual and you can’t really question that,” Novak commented. “Having been independent for so many years, it’s sort of difficult to join a large group.”

After a four-year-long courtship prolonged by the onset of COVID-19 and an overabundance of caution, however, Novak felt less apprehensive about joining Weber Gallagher.

“Everything about Weber Gallagher made it inviting,” he said.

Despite this, both Novak and Weber Gallagher approached the merger slowly. Indeck specifically wanted to ensure the two attorneys from Novak would successfully integrate into Weber Gallagher’s culture, as well as ascertain if Novak’s clients and technological systems would “mesh” into the firm.

Overall, “there are a lot of moving parts when you’re absorbing a firm rather than a lateral partner, so to speak,” Indeck said, contributing to the slow pace of the merger.

Novak and Costello expect to see their clients follow them in the move to their new firm. Most of the firm’s clients, according to Novak, are syndicates in London, referring to Novak Law’s ties to London-based insurance group Lloyd’s, although he and Costello represent domestic insurers as well.

Now that Weber Gallagher has absorbed Novak Law, the firm maintains a “cautious, conservative, continuous growth mode” that looks beyond its insurance practice, as well as an interest in updating its security systems.

Indeck cited the firm’s worker’s compensation, employment, and general liability practices as areas where clients were expressing interest now that the firm had a Midwestern presence, although he didn’t mention any future expansion plans

He also mentioned that the firm is looking to improve upon its document management and case management system, switching over to a completely cloud-based system and using an Amazon Web Services server-based-program to ensure the firm is meeting the security needs of its clients.

In addition to meeting client security requirements, the firm is also looking to streamline internal operations. According to Indeck, the firm is looking “just to meet the 21st century practice of law.”