

DAILY REPORT

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Shook Launches Atlanta Office With Trio of Alston Partners

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AM LAW 200 firm Shook, Hardy & Bacon has launched an Atlanta office with three product liability defense partners from Alston & Bird: Colin Kelly, who's heading the office, Josh Becker and Anna Sumner Pieschel.

Atlanta is the first incursion into the Southeast, outside of Florida, for the 500-lawyer, litigation-focused firm, which has 90% of its lawyers practicing in that area. Founded 130 years ago in Kansas City, Missouri, Shook placed at No. 103 on The American Lawyer's Am Law 200 revenue ranking for 2018 with \$348.1 million in revenue and \$918,000 in average profits per equity partner.

Atlanta is Shook's 14th office, following a Los Angeles office that opened in April with a five-lawyer litigation team from Sidley Austin.

"Shook goes where we need to be to serve our clients," said the



Managing partner Colin Kelly (from left) and partners Anna Sumner Pieschel and Josh Becker have left Alston & Bird to open an office in Atlanta for Shook, Hardy & Bacon

co-chair of Shook's general liability litigation practice, Paul Williams, adding that the firm already has numerous client relationships in Atlanta, including locally based The Coca-Cola Co. and UPS.

Williams said the new partners from Alston share some common

clients with Shook and have complementary practices. He emphasized that Shook is still a firm where culture matters.

"We are very client-focused but also people-focused. We want to create an ambiance where people enjoy the people they are working

with,” he said. “Colin, Josh and Anna are our kind of people—energetic, friendly, talented—and they do great work.”

“We wish each of them well in their new endeavors,” said the head of Alston’s product liability practice, Scott Elder.

Kelly, Becker and Pieschel each had spent their career to date at Alston—18 years for Kelly and 15 years apiece for Becker and Pieschel. They said that, at midcareer, they were attracted by the chance to start something new, and the litigation-focused firm is a good fit for their practices.

“Shook is the gold standard in product liability, complex litigation and mass torts in our areas,” Kelly said.

“We’ve worked with the firm over the years on the same side on big-ticket litigation, and we thought very highly of them,” he said. “To launch that brand in Atlanta—we couldn’t say no.”

Atlanta has become an increasingly crowded market for Big Law. Shook is the 45th Am Law 100 or Second Hundred firm to plant a flag in the city.

But Kelly said Shook’s litigation brand and rate flexibility distinguish it. “Shook is very innovative with fee structures and has been a pioneer in offering rate

flexibility and alternative fees,” he said.

“The ability to chart our own course professionally in a litigation-focused firm with lots of class action and tort work was a big driver for me,” Becker said. “It was the right firm at the right place and right time.”

Pieschel added that Shook’s commitment to diversity was another draw, noting that 45 percent of its executive committee is made up of women or diverse partners and that its chair, Madeleine McDonough, is female, still a rarity in Big Law.

The new Shook partners, who joined on June 8, declined to name clients, because they are still transitioning them.

In addition to product liability work, Kelly handles crisis management matters for clients including tech, automotive and manufacturing companies. He’s also an experienced commercial litigator.

Pieschel handles medical device and toxic tort cases but also has a broader practice. She provides risk assessments for both health care providers and practices and defends them in medical malpractice cases. She’s also handled defamation and First Amendment matters.

Becker said he represents consumer products companies, adding

that he’s spent the past four years focused on talc-liability defense cases.

In addition to the Alston recruits, Shook partners John Lewis and Leonard Searcy are joining the new Atlanta office. Searcy, who has an intellectual property practice that includes Atlanta-based clients, will divide his time between Kansas City and Atlanta.

Over his 14-year tenure at Coke in Atlanta, Lewis served as global head of litigation and then chief diversity officer, before leaving in 2016 for local boutique Lawrence & Bundy.

When Lewis decided to move to a national firm, Lewis said, he chose Shook, a firm he knew well from his time as a client of Shook’s at Coke and from his first decade in practice in Kansas City. The two big draws for him, Lewis said, were that Shook tries more cases to verdict than most big firms—and the firm’s strong record on diversity.

Kelly said he envisions Shook’s Atlanta office growing to as many as 20 lawyers in the next five years.

The firm is signing a five-year lease for 11,000 square feet—about half a floor—in the Promenade Building at 1230 Peachtree St. N.E. in Midtown. ☎