

THE BUFFALO NEWS

What Buffalo Niagara's legal landscape looks like after a year of upheaval

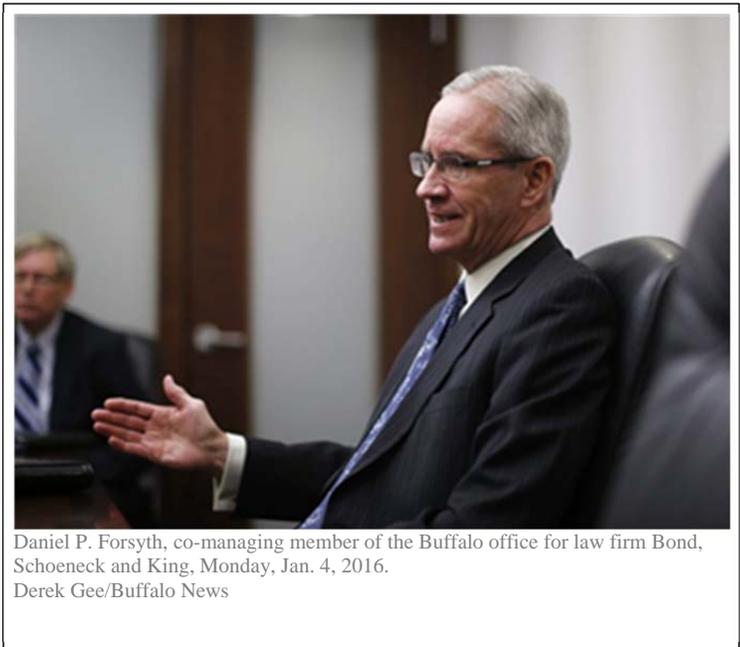
By Matt Glynn
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The region's roster of law firms underwent a shakeup last year, and the effects will be fully felt this year.

Two of the region's top four firms – Damon Morey and Jaeckle, Fleischmann & Mugel – were absorbed through deals. And with those transactions, two Syracuse-based firms strengthened their presence here.

The region has numerous law firms of all sizes and specialties. The four largest are:

Bond, Schoeneck & King: Lawyers and support staff from Bond's Buffalo office and Jaeckle are getting to know each other better, after Syracuse-based Bond completed its acquisition of Jaeckle on Jan. 1.



Daniel P. Forsyth, co-managing member of the Buffalo office for law firm Bond, Schoeneck and King, Monday, Jan. 4, 2016.
Derek Gee/Buffalo News

Bond already had a Buffalo office but says it now has the full-service location here it had sought. For its part, Jaeckle said the deal filled holes in certain practice areas. Their combined office consists of 52 lawyers and 28 support staff.

As they prepared to complete the deal, the two firms formed about a dozen teams related to individual practice groups, to make the transition as smooth as possible. “That’s when you got a great sense that everything we had hoped, in terms of a great cultural fit, proved to be true,” said Daniel P. Forsyth, co-managing member of the Buffalo office.

The two firms also prepared their clients for the change. “I’ve probably talked to 50 clients personally, and the reaction has been universally enthusiastic and positive,” said Joseph P. Kubarek, formerly Jaeckle’s managing partner and now co-managing member of the Buffalo office. “I think clients realized this gives us the opportunity to provide them everything we did for them in the past, and some new services and more depth.”

Kevin M. Bernstein, chairman of Bond’s management committee, said the deal allowed Bond to get in on the “ground floor” of new development in the Buffalo Niagara region. “And I think we’re in a much better position to be part of it now with this combination than we ever were before.”

Barclay Damon: Hiscock & Barclay didn't complete its deal with Damon Morey until last June, so 2016 marks the combined firm's first full year of business. Barclay Damon consists of a dozen offices, including one in Buffalo.

The Buffalo location is Barclay Damon's largest office, with 105 attorneys.

The combination has enhanced the legal services available to the firm's clients, said James Domagalski, co-managing partner of the Buffalo office along with Peter S. Marlette. He recalled an example from the first week after the deal was completed, when a legacy Damon Morey client had a cybersecurity issue. "Because it was now Barclay Damon, there was a team of lawyers who had handled a lot of cybersecurity law who were able to jump right in."

Marlette said the firm frequently uses videoconferencing to connect clients with lawyers based at other Barclay Damon offices, to tap into their expertise. "You don't always have to be shoulder to shoulder with the people you're working with."

Hodgson Russ: The firm remains the dominant player in Buffalo: it has 164 lawyers based here, among nearly 400 employees who work for the firm here.

Development unfolding in downtown Buffalo and places such as the Buffalo Niagara Medical Campus has generated a positive impact on its business, said Daniel C. Oliverio, the firm's chairman. "We've already seen it affect our recruiting of new lawyers and lateral lawyers," he said.

For lawyers fresh out of law school, he said, Buffalo is now more of a destination than in the past. "Things are starting to change," he said.

Oliverio said Hodgson Russ expects growth in standard areas of practice such as litigation, but also in areas including real estate finance, taxes and cross-border activity.

"You're generally seeing an increase across the board, which is very good for Western New York," he said.

Hodgson Russ has a total of six offices, including one in Toronto. The law firm, which was established in 1817, is approaching its 200th anniversary.

Oliverio said Hodgson Russ is used to seeing comings and goings involving other firms in the market, but its focus hasn't changed because of those deals. "We're continuing to do what we do," he said.

Phillips Lytle: Two years ago, the firm moved from what was then the One HSBC Center tower into the revitalized building named One Canalside.

Now settled in its new home, the firm has continued to grow. It is coming off a strong 2015, with many of those revenues generated from outside of Western New York, said David McNamara, managing partner. And some of the work the firm handles from its Buffalo office is for clients who are not even located here.

"If you have the expertise, you get a pricing advantage by virtue of being in Buffalo," he said.

Some of the practices showing particular strength include project development, banking and finance, energy and pharmaceuticals, McNamara said.

Phillips Lytle has eight offices, including a Washington, D.C., office it added in 2014. “We’re looking at opportunities to strengthen and grow our practice there,” he said.

The firm has about 290 employees in Buffalo, about 100 of whom are lawyers.

As for the recent acquisitions involving other firms in the region, McNamara said: “These transactions don’t change the landscape for us significantly, because it’s not as if new lawyers with new capabilities are being introduced to the marketplace for the first time.”