

In The News

Meet the Houston Law Firm that Hopes to Hire Away Your Best Lawyers

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If you're the partner in charge of bonuses at one of the big Houston law firms, you may want to add a zero to this year's check if you want to keep your best practitioners.

Dallas-based boutique law firm Munsch Hardt Kopf & Harr PC has doubled its office space on the 27th floor of Pennzoil Place in downtown Houston and could double the number of lawyers it has working in town. The expansion is the brainchild of CEO Phil Appenzeller, a former Army JAG whose Houston growth strategy is as aggressive as the Airborne wings he once wore.

"We have 80 lawyers in our Dallas office," the 2012 Reuters Super Lawyer honoree told the Houston Business Journal. "Houston could eventually be as big."

When it comes to luring talent to the corporate law firm that hopes to build up its energy finance, health care and commercial real estate practices in the Houston market, Appenzeller said he plans to shop locally.

"We mostly practice only in Texas," Appenzeller told HBJ. "We understand Texas."

The firm started out in the mid-1980s with just six lawyers and has since grown to 110 lawyers in Dallas, Austin and Houston. Practice groups initially included business litigation, corporate and securities, corporate finance, insolvency, restructuring and creditors' rights. Over the past few years that has expanded into real estate, health care, immigration, and labor and employment.

Among the new fields of practice, Appenzeller said health care "presents the greatest opportunity for growth in the Houston market."

Although he's based in Dallas, Appenzeller told HBJ that he'll start spending more time here, while COO Lee Morris will be here at least once a week as the firm expands into the Houston market.

The new space is about 21,000 square feet and has room for up to 45 lawyers and staff. But Munsch, which currently has about 20 lawyers practicing in downtown Houston, could quickly outgrow that space.

"I'm interviewing four candidates this week," Appenzeller said with a grin.

Another law firm making a big splash in the Bayou City is Washington, D.C.-based Arnold & Porter LLP, which opened its first Houston office last month.

Last year, seven new law firms moved into Houston, mostly lured by the ongoing energy boom. [Click here to see which seven.](#)

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