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# Law Firm Leader Q&A: Sheppard Mullin's Lucantonio Salvi and Jonathan Aronie

It's been a little more than 10 years since the Washington office of Sheppard, Mullin, Richter & Hampton opened its doors. Since then the office has grown from two attorneys to about 60 lawyers. And the office is not yet finished growing.

Leading the charge since October 2012 are co-managing partners Lucantonio Salvi and Jonathan Aronie. Like most of the attorneys in Sheppard Mullin's Washington office, the duo are laterals from another firm.

Aronie was one of five attorneys who made the jump from Fried, Frank, Harris, Shriver & Jacobson in July 2003. Salvi joined the firm in February 2006 from Latham & Watkins.

Legal Times sat down with Salvi and Aronie to discuss growth, the firm's new office and how they spend their time outside practicing law.

### Why have two managing partners instead of one?

Aronie: I think the reason we both wanted and the firm wanted co-managing partners is because we both intend to keep our practices. Nowadays it takes a lot of time to run



an office. If you're not careful it can become a full-time job. We both care about running the office, but we both care about our clients first.

We talked when we started about

whether we would divide up the world. We both decided that while it could come to a formal split at some point, that's not how we wanted to start. What we try to do is work together on some things, but

on many of the issues it's almost like you're in line at the deli counter. Your number is up and you take that issue. Luca just finished up a new acquisition of laterals. I am working on a separate acquisition of laterals. I'm doing an issue involving staff improvement. The next staff improvement that comes down the line, Luca will take. That has worked well so far.

### **What is the growth plan of the Washington office?**

Salvi: Our D.C. office has been and continues to be in growth mode. We are moving offices to give us more space and meet the strategic initiative of the firm, which is to grow our East Coast practice.

I think today we're at 57 or 58 attorneys. Hopefully that number is going to grow significantly in the next few weeks. Our growth strategy as an office is to get to 75 to 90 attorneys in the next three to five years. We have a good problem in that we don't have many more offices to fill. Our growth strategy in terms of practice area is that we're a full service office and each of our own practice groups has their own growth plan. We are strategically focused on growing the M&A corporate practice. We are also focused on sub-markets like private equity, defense and healthcare.

### **How does the firm find and recruit its attorneys?**

Salvi: There are two different strategies that work for us when recruiting attorneys. One is personal relationships, and we've had fabulous successes because we have had personal relationships that have attracted attorneys to our firm. But we also know that headhunters play a very important role in that, so we have good relationships with headhunters that are focused on various practices for us. They have been very useful to us as part of our growth strategy. Ten years ago we were two attorneys and we are almost 60 now. It's been a very successful office for us as a firm. While it was originally envisioned as being a regulatory hub for our largest clients who were staying up at night, it has now become much more of a full service office that works with the other offices.

Aronie: We would be lying to ourselves if we said that every lateral over the years has worked out. It certainly hasn't. But what we would say is that the people who have worked out here did so because they share our enthusiasm and excitement to growing an office. Luca and I view this as an exciting entrepreneurial project.

Salvi: I think we're the only office in all of Sheppard Mullin that is 100 percent lateral partner staffed. We are making a lot of associates partners internally, but I think today all of our partners have lateraled as partners or associates. One of the hallmarks of our firm is that the national average for lateral partner retention is about 40 percent. We are more than double that. We really integrate our lateral partners and self-select ones that will fit well.

### **What can you tell me about the firm's new office?**

Salvi: We have just executed a lease and we are going to be getting a property for build out later this summer. We hope to move into the property by next summer. (The firm currently occupies 64,000 square-foot with 72 offices at 1300 Eye Street N.W., compared to 54,000 square-foot and 90 offices with expansion space for up to 120 offices at 2099 Pennsylvania Avenue N.W.)

### **What drove the desire to expand on the east coast and more specifically Washington?**

Aronie: When the firm first decided to have a D.C. office, some of the due diligence that led up to that was they asked our current clients, "What keeps you up at night?" One of the top answers was the federal government. It is not a surprising answer and one shared by many of our clients. That is what directed everyone's sights on D.C. If you ask companies today, it hasn't changed that much. It's still the federal government. Other things keep them up too. The D.C. office continues to be a driver in the firm's overall strategy.

### **What keeps you busy outside the practice of law?**

Aronie: I coach my kid's basketball

teams. My wife coaches their soccer teams. We spend a lot of times on weekends driving from one game to another. I ride my bike to work in the good weather, which I love. I'm now on the short list, the final two, to be the independent monitor over the New Orleans police department. I was the former deputy independent monitor over the D.C. Police Department. Police departments, when they get into litigation with the Department of Justice, it often ends up in a consent decree. The consent decree requires the appointment of an independent monitor. Sheppard Mullin is now one of two firms left to be the New Orleans independent monitor. DOJ investigated New Orleans and concluded that they had patterns and practices of constitutional violations. As a result of New Orleans and DOJ working together, they entered into a consent decree which the court approved. That requires the appointment of a monitor.

Salvi: Both my wife and I are first generation Americans. My family is all from Italy. My wife's family is all from western Ukraine. We get a lot of cross-cultural communication in the family. We love to travel. We love to out on bike rides and go hiking with the kids. The kids are at an age now where their school and their sports take on a life of their own. We also set aside time for ourselves to try the new restaurants in town.

### **Do you have a favorite Italian dish?**

Salvi: I'm a simple guy. If I have my linguini al pesto, that is pretty much the end all for me.

*This is part of a series of Q&A sessions Legal Times is conducting with D.C.-based law firm managing partners. Photo by The National Law Journal's Diego M. Radzinski.*

Posted by Matthew Huisman