

Sheppard Swells Its Ranks

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SAN FRANCISCO — Sheppard, Mullin, Richter & Hampton has been snapping up lawyers in California like hot cakes in the last seven months. Since the start of the year, the Los Angeles-based firm has added 29 attorneys, including six corporate, four IP and 11 labor and employment practitioners.

Seyfarth Shaw labor and employment partner Michael Gallion was one of the recent additions when he joined Sheppard in July with two other partners. This week, the rest of their team joined them when special counsel David Van Pelt and associates Jennifer Abramowitz, Laurie Barnes, Paul Berkowitz and Kate Visosky and staff followed.

Gallion, who specializes in wage-and-hour class actions, said he hadn't been seriously looking to move from Seyfarth, which had been his home for the past 14 years, but when long-time colleague Thomas Kaufman, co-head of the wage-and-hour group at Seyfarth, struck up a conversation with Sheppard, Gallion said he was in. The two had joined Seyfarth within a week of each other and have partnered on cases for years, Gallion said.

Southern California legal recruiter Sabina Lippman of Watanabe Nason Schwartz & Lippman brokered the deal.

Sheppard Mullin, with about 550 lawyers, has fewer attorneys than Chicago-based Seyfarth, but is more profitable: In 2009, Sheppard generated \$1.245 million in per partner profits. Equity partners at Seyfarth made on average \$690,000.

Though Gallion said there weren't "critical differences" between the labor and employment practices at the two firms, a number of other attributes at Sheppard persuaded him to make the move. For one, the Los Angeles-based firm had "the California thing" going for it: Eight of its 11 offices are peppered across the state. That was a plus for his practice, Gallion said, because the vast majority of his and Kaufman's wage-and-hour cases are filed here. What's more, Sheppard has a highly regarded entertainment practice. "[At Seyfarth] we had no entertainment practice in a town where that's one of the most important practices," Gallion said. He was also impressed with Sheppard's open compensation system and financial transparency. "The firm is open about where the money's spent and how people are paid," he said. "There's no secrets." By contrast, Seyfarth has a blind comp system, he said.

Still, uprooting was tough. Gallion said for him, one of the most emotional parts was leaving L.A. office managing partner and mentor Kenwood Youmans. "Seyfarth gave me incredible opportunities," Gallion said. "I learned so much from wonderful lawyers."

Seyfarth was unable to comment at press time, said a firm spokeswoman.