

Half of Folger Levin to Join Crowell & Moring

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Three years after **Folger Levin & Kahn** transferred management to a new generation of partners, the San Francisco firm is splintering.

A group of 25 San Francisco litigators, including name partner Michael Kahn and litigation chair Gregory Call, will establish a beachhead for Washington, D.C.'s **Crowell & Moring**. One L.A. litigation partner, Jennifer Romano, and three associates are also joining Crowell.

The deal, to be finalized by the end of November, gives the 450-lawyer Washington, D.C., firm an instant litigation presence in Northern California.

Crowell Chairman Kent Gardiner said the partnership voted unanimously Friday to add the litigation group.

Peter Folger and John Levin will continue practicing with 14 others -- mostly estate planning and business lawyers -- under the name Folger Levin. Adam Sachs, now the chair of Folger's business department, will be the new managing partner of that firm. Co-founders Peter Folger and John Levin, who had taken on lesser roles in recent years, will become more active in the new firm, Sachs said. "They will be practicing full time," Sachs said. The new Folger Levin will open Nov. 2 at 199 Fremont St.

Folger had nine lawyers in Los Angeles, but only one is joining Crowell. The managing partner of the L.A. office, Wesley Hurst, is joining 27-lawyer **Rutter Hobbs & Davidoff** in Century City.

Labor and employment partner Nancy Yaffe will be joining the L.A. office of **Fox Rothschild**, according to a Fox spokesman. Los Angeles legal recruiter Delia Swan brokered that deal.

Lawyers familiar with Folger Levin say the business and litigation groups had been growing apart. Kahn, who is joining Crowell as senior counsel, said Folger's small footprint has meant turning away work. "I've spent a lot of my time in the last 15 years helping clients find lawyers in other cities," he said Friday. Last year, he had an antitrust matter in Europe for a U.S. client he had to hire a London firm for. "I wouldn't have to do that now."

Folger lawyers say the firm hadn't been searching for a merger partner. The two firms grew acquainted over the past year, after Kahn had hired Crowell & Moring partners in D.C. to handle a tax matter for a client he declined to name. Crowell "performed fabulously," he said.

Crowell's Gardiner said his firm approached Folger Levin about joining forces in the spring. "I wouldn't say we weren't interested in [the business lawyers]," he said, but "we went into it principally from the litigation context."

Crowell handles litigation in Northern California for clients such as AT&T, Dupont and United Technologies. He said it's the biggest acquisition Crowell has made in its efforts to build a national litigation practice. Last year, Crowell opened a Los Angeles office by acquiring a small white-collar and securities litigation group of lawyers from Lightfoot Vandeveld Sadowsky Crouchley Rutherford & Levine. It also has an office in Irvine. The firm is best known in D.C. for its government contracts practice.

The push to open in San Francisco didn't come from Crowell clients, Gardiner said, but instead from the chance to pick up people from Folger Levin. "We didn't think we'd have this kind of opportunity, and we're thrilled to have it," Gardiner said. The office will focus on antitrust, environmental, financial and general commercial litigation, where the firms found the most cross-over, Gardiner said.

Call, who will head Crowell's new office as the San Francisco chairman of Crowell's litigation group, said the firms are a good match culturally, as well as business-wise. "There's a shared sense of community spirit, a sense of cooperation, and a sense of putting people first." Though there are some mixed feelings about parting ways with longtime colleagues, he said: "The overriding emotion is a sense of optimism in what the future holds."

Folger Levin & Kahn was established in 1978. Levin gave up the chairman title three years ago after a 30-year run. Teresa Lippert was named managing partner, and the firm saw some defections -- five of the six partners who left in 2007 were women -- as it tried to **put a renewed focus** on the bottom line.

Sachs said Friday that Lippert is planning to retire.