

Merger links 3 law firms across nation

BY STEPHEN NELLIS
Staff Writer

Alston & Bird – one of the nation's largest law firms – has dipped its toe into the Tri-Counties.

As a result, six Weston Benshoof Rochefort Rubalcava & MacCuish attorneys in Westlake Village will work for a firm starting Sept. 1.

Atlanta-based Alston & Bird merged with Weston Benshoof on July 30; the change becomes official Sept. 1. Los Angeles-based Weston Benshoof has a total of 83 attorneys but maintains a Westlake

Village office with a government relations director and six attorneys, including former Ventura County District Attorney Michael Bradbury and former Thousand Oaks Mayor Chuck Cohen.

Thomas Cohen, the partner in charge at Weston Benshoof's Westlake Village location, said his office likely will add "a few more [attorneys] than we have today."

"We really haven't gotten into the specifics yet," Thomas Cohen said. "I have my vision, as to what I would like to see, but I have other partners."

Though it had more than 800 attor-

neys, Alston & Bird had few offices in California before the deal. Its merger with Weston Benshoof in Los Angeles and another 12-attorney firm in Silicon Valley brings its total attorney count to about 900 and raises the possibility that it might seek offices in Sacramento or Santa Barbara.

"I think we'll keep all that open," Thomas Cohen said. "We'll be looking at opportunities for sure."

"While Alston & Bird has been representing clients on the West Coast for years, teaming up with some of the best talent in Los Angeles and Silicon Valley

gives us stronger footing in a number of key practice areas that will benefit our clients and better serve their needs," Richard Hays, Alston & Bird's managing partner, said in a release.

With \$533 million in 2007 revenue, Alston & Bird ranked 54th on American Lawyer magazine's recent AmLaw 100.

Its merger with Weston Benshoof represents the second AmLaw 100 firm to put down a footprint in the Tri-Counties: Shepard, Mullin, Richter & Hampton, which

see **MERGER** on page 21A

AUGUST 8-14, 2008

PACIFIC COAST BUSINESS TIMES

MERGER

Continued from page 3A

ranked 78th in AmLaw 100, merged with Santa Barbara-based Nida & Maloney in 2001 and maintains 10 practicing attorneys on the South Coast.

The Weston Benshoof deal is the second law firm merger in the Tri-Counties in less than year.

On Jan. 1, Denver-based Brownstein Hyatt Farber Schreck merged with Santa Barbara-based Hatch & Parent, which, with 35 attorneys, was the region's largest local firm.

Robert Saperstein, formerly the managing partner of Hatch & Parent and now a shareholder in the Santa Barbara office of Brownstein Hyatt Farber Schreck, said the Weston Benshoof deal made sense for the same reason that his firm's merger made sense: Each firm gained something.

"To be competitive in the Southern California area, you need to be best-in-class in what you do as a small- to medium-sized firm, or you need to be a big



Hays



Tom Cohen



Chuck Cohen

firm and have name recognition," Saperstein said. "To have some combination of the two is the best of all worlds."

Hatch & Parent's merger left Oxnard's Nordman Cormany Hair & Compton, which has 37 attorneys, as the Tri-Counties' largest firm.

Tony Trembley, its managing partner, said the recent mergers will probably have little effect on the region's independent firms. "We're a very different legal market than Los Angeles," Trembley said. "On the other hand, our practice is every bit as complex as downtown L.A. We like our independence, and more important,

our clients like our independence."

Locally based firms often have long-standing relationships with clients and can offer a more personal touch than national firms, said Doug Kulper, the managing partner of Ventura-based Ferguson Case Orr Patterson & Cunningham, which

has 25 attorneys. "We know everybody in our firm. We have a high level of knowledge of what they're doing, who they're working with," Kulper said. "That's impossible at large firms."

Alston & Bird has offices in New York, Washington, D.C., Charlotte, N.C., Atlanta, Dallas, Palo Alto and Research Triangle Park, N.C.

Among the firm's professionals are former GOP presidential candidate Bob Dole and former Sen. Tom Daschle, D-S.D., an adviser to presumptive Democratic Party nominee Sen. Barack Obama, D-Ill.