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## Moore & Van Allen is new No. 1 on North Carolina's Largest Law Firms list

By: Teri Saylor April 27, 2021

A growth spurt over the last year has propelled Moore & Van Allen to the top spot in the North Carolina Lawyers Weekly's roster of the largest law firm in the state.

Moore & Van Allen added 28 attorneys last year to increase its headcount to 299 and overtake Womble Bond Dickinson, which has been ranked as the largest law firm in the state for several years. Womble Bond Dickinson, which moves to the second spot, maintained its headcount at 271.

Thomas Mitchell, chairman of Moore & Van Allen's executive committee, credits his firm's partners for building relationships and adding clients to enable the firm to grow.

"We've been quite active in the lateral market in the last five years, and we have had to build capacity to service our growing client base," Mitchell said.

Tax, health care, securities, and employment law have been the firm's most active sectors, and Mitchell reports he's also seen an uptick in transactional matters. The firm has also spent the last five years developing a new investment management practice.

"We're very happy with that new practice, and it has contributed to our growth in numbers as well," Mitchell said.

North Carolina Lawyers Weekly's annual ranking of the Largest Law Firms in North Carolina is a snapshot of a moment in time, and as workplaces begin to transition to a post-COVID world, North Carolina law firms have weathered the storm. Some are a little smaller. Some, like Moore & Van Allen, have grown. Overall, the profession appears hale and healthy.

Legal Aid of North Carolina (248) also experienced a significant growth spurt, of 24 attorneys, and maintained its third-place ranking. With 202 attorneys, down three from last year, McGuire Woods continues to rank fourth. Parker Poe rounded out the top five with 156 attorneys, an increase of eight.

Parker Poe attributes its success to focusing in 2020 on things that strengthen the firm and differentiate it in the marketplace, managing partner Tom Griffin said, and the firm worked at growing strategic practices across the markets it serves and maintaining and nurturing the firm's culture.

"Our culture was particularly important to our success—the fact that people genuinely like to work here helped us attract talented lawyers and staff to our family," Griffin said.

Robinson Bradshaw (145) grew by three attorneys and Smith Anderson (139) grew by two attorneys, maintaining their spots at sixth and seventh place, respectively. They were followed by Alston & Bird (119), which wasn't on the 2020 list.

K&L Gates (107) grew by one and remained in ninth. Kilpatrick Townsend (103) contracted by one and moved to tenth place.

North Carolina's rankings also include new appearances by Nexsen Pruet (68), Ellis & Winters (34), Smith Debnam (30), King & Spalding (28), Hutchens (28), Ragsdale Liggett (21), and Jackson Lewis (19). None of the firms from last year's list dropped out or declined to participate this year.

Of the 32 firms that were returning from last year's list, 15 reported growth over the past year, adding 96 attorneys to their collective rosters. Meanwhile, 13 firms reported a collective loss of 46 attorneys, leaving an overall increase of 50 attorney positions among the firms appearing on both lists.

**No going back**

COVID-19 also affected law firms in ways that their leadership believes has changed them forever. The pandemic curtailed travel, forcing court hearings, depositions, and in-person meetings to take place over virtual platforms such as Zoom and WebEx.

As Moore & Van Allen's attorneys and staff start making their way back to their Charlotte office this year, Mitchell predicts the firm will look a little different in the future.

"We'll have more flexible working schedules, and I think we'll have a mix of in-office and remote work, and even a sharing of office space by attorneys," Mitchell said. "I don't know if we'll ever go back to the way we were before."

Many firms reported that the transition went as well or even better than could have been hoped for. McGuireWoods transitioned to a largely remote work environment in March 2020 because of COVID-19 without missing a beat, said Mary Nash Rusher, managing partner of the firm's Raleigh office.

"We were able to stay connected to our colleagues and meet our clients' needs, and as law firms and other businesses reimagine their work environments after the pandemic, we now know from our experience that we can be nimble and flexible in ways that benefit our lawyers and our clients," Rusher said.

The annual survey of North Carolina's Largest Law firms is based on the self-reported number of North Carolina licensed lawyers practicing in firms across the state and reflects headcounts as of Jan. 1, 2020. This year, 40 firms were included in our list, and a larger number participated in the survey.

The information was gathered over the past month, using email and digital survey questions to put together an up-to-date list from information from all the firms that appeared in the 2020 survey and others who wanted to submit data about their firm. A few law firms declined to participate in the 2021 rankings.

In compiling the 2021 survey of North Carolina's largest law firms, we have made every effort to provide complete and accurate information. If we have inadvertently left out a firm or incorrectly reported information, please contact executive editor David Donovan at [ddonovan@nclawyersweekly.com](mailto:ddonovan@nclawyersweekly.com).

We will begin collecting data for the 2022 issue of North Carolina's Largest Law Firms next spring.

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