

Shipman & Goodwin Taps 3 For 'Unique' Take On Leadership

By Rachel Rippetoe

Law360 (December 22, 2020, 10:21 PM EST) -- A Northeast firm announced it's shaking things up by electing a three-person leadership team to replace its retiring managing partner, in an effort to expand its footprint.

Shipman & Goodwin LLP said Monday that three senior partners on its Managing Committee, Leander A. Dolphin, James P. Ruggeri and Kent S. Nevins, are going to head up the firm together, replacing managing partner Alan E. Lieberman, who will retire at the end of this year.

"I think it's a fairly unique structure," Dolphin told Law360. "But my sense is that it's a growing trend."

The mid-sized firm, looking to grow in the national and international market, decided that having a leadership team instead of a single managing partner would give it an edge, Dolphin told Law360. A three-person team can divide management responsibilities and thus each managing partner is able to continue practicing law.

"You really do need your leaders to understand what the clients are asking, what pressures practicing lawyers are facing, what our staff is facing," Dolphin said. "And I think that being practicing lawyers keeps us closer to that. The more time you spend away from the practice, the less connected you are to those things."

Shipman & Goodwin has offices in Connecticut, New York and Washington, D.C., altogether hosting 158 attorneys and 86 partners, but the firm is looking to grow, Dolphin said. The three new managing partners, each located in different offices, all specialize in areas of law that will be key to expanding the firm's practice nationally and even internationally, she said.

Dolphin, who is located in the Hartford, Connecticut, office, works on the firm's school law practice, representing public school districts, private schools, and colleges and universities in education and employment matters. Nevins, in the Stamford, Connecticut, office, represents clients in the national real-estate market, and Ruggeri, in the Washington, D.C., office, is mainly a corporate litigator, specializing in areas like bankruptcy and insurance coverage.



Leander A. Dolphin



Kent S. Nevins



James P. Ruggeri

"We want to capitalize on our collaborations to help us grow as one firm throughout our D.C., New York and Connecticut footprint and beyond, and to serve our clients better with increased depth in key practices across the region," Ruggeri said in a press release.

Dolphin said soon the three will discuss what it will look like to divide management responsibilities among three different people, and how to streamline communication so that attorneys and other employees know who to turn to with different questions or concerns. It can be a challenging transition, especially during the coronavirus pandemic when most lawyers are working remotely, she said.

"Managing a law firm is more complex than ever, with changing technologies, navigating COVID-19's lasting impact, and focusing on constantly evolving or developing practice areas," Nevins said in the press release. "But it is also a very exciting time to be a part of leadership, especially when leading a firm that is focused on fostering the next generation."

Working with schools, Dolphin said she was forced to adjust to the pandemic very early on, as her clients were facing immediate questions about how to keep students safe, whether to keep campuses open and how to transition to virtual learning.

"You kind of have to pivot very quickly, and our clients really led us in that direction, because their needs were immediately different," she said.

Dolphin started at Shipman & Goodwin as an associate in 2004, after graduating from the Howard University School of Law. She left the firm in 2007 to serve as the vice president, HR and general counsel to Girl Scouts of Connecticut. In 2009, she returned to Shipman & Goodwin and in 2015 became a partner.

Nevins has been a partner at Shipman & Goodwin since 2007 and gained his law degree from Pace University. He earned his bachelor's degree from the Pace University Lubin School of Business.

Ruggeri previously served as co-chair of Shipman & Goodwin's Insurance and Reinsurance group. Before, he was a partner at Hogan & Hartson LLP. He also clerked for U.S. District of Virginia Judge Rebecca Beach Smith. He graduated from the Vanderbilt University School of Law in 1990.

"This is a bold move that will take this firm to a new level," Lieberman, who helmed the firm as managing partner for five years, said in the statement. "The firm is in great hands with these three partners who have a vision and drive for excellence in everything they do."

--Editing by Michael Watanabe.