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INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY

From losing the & to the library that isn't, changes abound at IP firm Banner Witcoff

BY DUSTIN J. SEIBERT

The most profound change to occur in Banner Witcoff Ltd. in years might also be the subtlest: the disappearance of the ampersand between the firm's two surnames.

The intellectual property law firm will celebrate its 100th birthday in 2020 without its ampersand. The character has been a part of the firm name for decades. Sans the ampersand, the firm also has a new tagline: "Protecting IP. Propelling business."

The name change nearly coincides with the move of its Chicago office from 10 S. Wacker Drive, where it had been since 1988, to the 36th floor of 71 S. Wacker Drive last October.

The firm decided about a year ago to look at other office space that is more "reflective of the image we portray," said shareholder Katie Laatsch Fink.

"It was state of the art in 1988. And over time it got a little tired," Fink said.

'MORE EFFICIENT, BRIGHTER, MORE MODERN'

The move was done primarily in the interest of freshness and modernity, said Fink. That meant letting go of certain design elements in the old space, including the dark woods and columns that personify many law firms of a bygone era.

After looking at about 20 spaces with their agent, firm leadership narrowed its selection to 71 S. Wacker in large part because of the configurable floor plan. It was also important that the commute not change dramatically for staff: The new office is just east and across the street from the old building.

"We wanted a fresh and more modern office space that would be more attractive from both an employee happiness level as well as the perspective



of recruiting new talent,” Fink said. “We want things to be more efficient, brighter, more modern. This space reflects who we are and who we strive to be for our clients.”

That the space was previously occupied by a law firm added to its attractiveness, since it made things easier during the buildout.

“We didn’t have to completely reconfigure the office space,” Fink said. The firm that previously occupied the space had two sizes of offices, so we maintained the two office sizes rather than tearing down a bunch of walls.”

Increased efficiency added to the appeal: At 35,000 square feet, the total footprint is smaller than the 10 S. Wacker office, but what exists now is far more streamlined for the office’s 58 attorneys.

“We previously had one and a third floors in our last space and now every employee is on one floor, allowing for more interactions and collaboration,” Fink said. “But the footprint of our conference rooms is slightly larger; we definitely take advantage of more space where we can come together.”

Despite the smaller space, the new office has potential for

possible in the staid former office. That includes everything from improved acoustics in its three conference rooms to walls that support large televisions for teleconferencing.

The firm has always kept technology up to date, but there’s a noticeable subtraction this time around: Since Banner Witcoff is now virtually completely paperless, there is no longer a dedicated file room.

“Being an IP firm, we tend to be pretty forward-thinking when it comes to technology,” Fink said. “Going paperless and moving in the direction of current trends makes sense because everything we need is available on our computers.”

The “library” is that only in name: The work-and-lounge room doubles as a social area and a spot to unwind, complete with a dartboard, shuffleboard, video game systems and a retro-looking record player.

“People can do work here, but it’s a good space to socialize without having to put on a coat and leave the office,” Fink said.

The library, as well as the rest of the space, has garnered a



growth, Fink said.

“It was certainly one of our considerations. The way everything is structurally laid out allows for a more efficient floor plan so we are able to fit more office space in a smaller footprint, so we still have offices that are available for additional hiring.”

FRESH COATS OF PAINT

That 71 S. Wacker building was built within the last 20 years and allows Banner Witcoff to implement design elements that were not

positive response from the staff in the last four months.

“From the second you step off the elevators and enter the open reception area with the glass conference rooms, you see these great views of Chicago,” Fink said. “I think that’s allowed people to have an even more positive outlook and contributes to good energy in the office.” CL

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