

Q&A

Butler Snow leader sees local growth potential for firm

By William Williams

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Dan Elrod is a member of the executive committee of Butler Snow O'Mara Stevens & Cannada PLLC. Headquartered in suburban Jackson, Miss., Butler Snow in early June expanded within the Nashville market (previously, the firm had a small office in Franklin), primarily with attorneys from the local office of Miller & Martin PLLC. Nearly five months into the aftermath of that development, Elrod, who is based in Nashville, sat down with *City Paper* assistant business editor William Williams for a chat.

Butler Snow is an influential law firm in the Southeast and could have opened a high-profile office elsewhere in the region. Why Nashville?

The firm targeted Nashville because it is a thriving, successful metro city with visionary leaders, a strong business environment and excellent quality of life. The Middle Tennessee marketplace is progressive, innovative and leading edge – and is an essential part of our strategic growth efforts.

We have now expanded our Nashville office to 43 attorneys, and have nearly 100 in Tennessee. With this expansion, Butler Snow became one of the largest firms in the state with more than 230 attorneys practicing in 13 offices nationwide.

The firm's Nashville office is comprised almost exclusively of former Miller & Martin attorneys. In fact, you yourself were at Miller & Martin. Some might contend this could limit Butler Snow in its efforts to quickly establish its own identity in the market. Others may question – perceiving it possibly as a dog-eat-dog move – how everything went down as Butler Snow lured, en masse, most of the Miller & Martin team. I'm sure it was a tricky situation. Your take?

Actually, quite the opposite. Miller & Martin is a fine firm, but several of us began to consider alternatives. We were very attracted to Butler Snow because of its innovative approach to the practice of law and real commitment to growth. Butler Snow's

philosophy is fully aligned with our goals and principles, and is ahead of the curve on many leading-edge law industry solutions.

The timing for Butler Snow and for our team who made this move just happened to coincide. Butler Snow has a very thoughtful strategy to grow in Nashville and in other markets.

What differentiates Butler Snow from other law firms in terms of how it conducts business? I understand, for example, you use alternative billing.

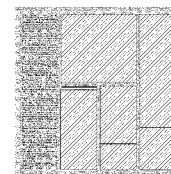
We are constantly seeking new ways to better serve our clients. Considering the economic challenges our clients face, we have implemented strategies such as flat fee and alternative fee arrangements and shared-risk pricing solutions. Forty percent of our 2012 revenues are expected to be priced through alternative fee arrangements, with the goal to increase that percentage annually. Our clients appreciate the predictability and cost effectiveness that these innovations create.

Another distinguishing feature of Butler Snow is a firm culture that promotes collaboration that deemphasizes personal credit and that assures that the right lawyers at the right level of experience are representing our clients. Our clients take comfort in knowing that we are working effectively, and cost-efficiently, on their behalf. This firm culture, we believe, will also cause other experienced lawyers to conclude that Butler Snow is a superior place to practice law.

A substantive practice area that sets us apart is a strong government relations practice, which includes former Mississippi Gov. Haley Barbour, former Tennessee Congressman John Tanner and teams of government relations specialists in Mississippi, Tennessee and Louisiana. We also have a division operating as Butler Snow Advisory Services, which assists private, public and nonprofit enterprises in strategies that lead to sustainable economies.

Does the firm have additional growth plans for Nashville, the region or the country?

Yes, we will continue to grow in Nashville and across Tennessee, and will be aggressive in the markets that best serve our clients. Nashville's robust business environment will allow our firm to continue to expand in the Middle Tennessee region. Our Nashville team greatly strengthens many of the firm's existing practices, adding depth and breadth for clients throughout the region. We are fortunate to have vision-



ary leadership that is deeply committed to Nashville and the community. We have also identified Birmingham and Baton Rouge as key growth areas for Butler Snow, but additional growth will be driven by what best serves our clients' needs.

In what area is the Nashville legal community strongest and in what respect does it need the most improvement?

Nashville is blessed with a very strong legal community that can hold its own in all substantive areas of the law. Our sense is that most law firms in Nashville have not embraced alternative fee arrangements to the extent we have, and our strong presence in Nashville may accelerate acceptance of these arrangements.

