

Employment Law Boutique Firm Makes Strategic Move To Fairfield County

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Labor and employment boutique Mitchell & Sheahan has opened new office in Stamford to expand into the booming portion of the state that is home to many corporate offices and New York City commuters.

The Stratford-based firm has been considering making a strategic move to the growing area of Fairfield County some time. The firm made a step in that direction late last year when it hired Gary Phelan, a Westport lawyer who previously worked in the employment litigation practice of Cohen and Wolf in Bridgeport.

Phelan brought an understanding of the needs of Fairfield County employers and employees, having previously worked as a partner with Outten and Golden in their New York and Stamford offices, his new partners said. He will divide his time between Stratford and the new Stamford office.

Robert Mitchell, one of the two founding partners of the firm, said the Stamford expansion is important part of their business plan.

"We have served employers and employees throughout the region for many years," Robert Mitchell, one of the firm's founding members said. "With the continued corporate growth in lower Fairfield County, it was clear we needed to expand our presence in Stamford.

Peg Sheahan, the other founding partner, said bringing an office closer to a large number of their clients will help save time and improve overall efficiency.

"Just about every week we learn of new employment-related regulations on the state or federal level," Sheahan said. "Too often, people try to manage these legal matters on their own, spending countless hours before they realize they need legal representation. With our new office in Stamford, we will be more convenient for many individuals and companies."

Having a physical location closer to those clients "will help them more quickly and economically to resolve the employment issues they face," Sheahan said.

Phelan's practice includes representing both employers and employees. His expertise is a wide range of matters, including age and disability discrimination, family responsibility discrimination and wrongful termination.

In addition to representing both employers and employees in employment contracts and severance negotiations, Phelan said an area that is growing is the enforcement and creation of non-compete agreements.

"That is hot within the employment field," Phelan said. "These agreements arise where you have people trying to lock up talent and not lose their talent base. We're seeing a huge increase in the use of non-compete agreements."

They used to only be seen at the top-executive level, but "now it's expanding to jobs like hairstylists and every area of the market place," Phelan said. "People are leaving jobs when they have built up client bases, and employers are trying to protect themselves."

Phelan, who is licensed in both New York and Connecticut, spent several years early in his career working in New Haven. He said the advantage of locating an office in Stamford, is the reality that "many of my Fairfield and New York clients simply don't want to travel to Stratford.

While he will be dividing his time between the two offices, Phelan envisions a larger expansion, with more lawyers possibly being hired in the future. "We do intend to expand there gradually," he said.

The Stamford office located in a newly developed section near the waterfront, at 68 Southfield Avenue.