

# Lawyers exit to form own boutique firm

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STAFF WRITER

A group of high-powered attorneys has left Kilpatrick Stockton's Charlotte office to form their own boutique litigation firm.

The new firm, Hamilton Gaskins Fay & Moon, includes several of Kilpatrick Stockton's litigation partners and a handful of attorneys from other practice areas or other firms.

Lawyers leaving Kilpatrick Stockton include Rick Gaskins and Rick Fay, specialists in environmental law; David Hamilton and Jack Steele, construction litigation specialists and general business litigators; business litigator Keith Merritt; and trusts and estates lawyer Meg Goldstein.

They'll be joined by Tom Moon, a litigator and debtor-creditor attorney who has been with Smith Helms Mulliss & Moore since December 1999, after a 28-year career with Rayburn, Moon & Smith; Ben Martin, a construction litigator who's leaving Shumaker, Loop & Kendrick; Meg Maloney, a former Moore & VanAllen attorney who's now the senior human resources lawyer at First Union Corp.; and B. David Carson, a commercial and construction litigator with Erwin and Bernhardt.

Says Maloney: "The rationale behind it is that everyone was interested in a firm of people who care a lot about the community, as well as the law, and who can get the practice of law back to what we'd like it to be, which is the ability to have a lot of client focus without a lot of the big-firm bureaucracy."

The attorneys "have been very good partners and very good friends," says Pete Brunstetter, a Kilpatrick Stockton executive committee member and marketing partner. "We're always sorry to see folks leave who we value highly."

For Moon, the move offers an opportunity to return to a small-firm environment where competition doesn't place as many restrictions on referral work.

"I missed the referral debtor work I had done before and thought this was a great opportunity," he says.

John Lassiter, president of Carolina Legal Staffing, sees a key reason for such a move.

"There were a lot of attorneys who wanted a smaller practice — not having all the constraints and obligations of a national firm practice," Lassiter says. "They wanted to get

## New law firm's line-up

Several veteran lawyers from Charlotte firms are forming Hamilton, Gaskins Fay & Moon.



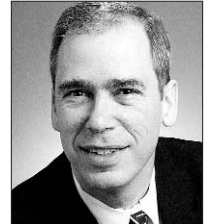
**Merritt**



**Goldstein**



**Steele**



**Gaskins**



**Hamilton**



**Fay**



**Carson**



**Maloney**

back to a more individually driven atmosphere."

The new firm will focus on litigation work for clients ranging from small businesses to large national clients with complex cases. It already has invested in technology to assist with that endeavor.

"We are trying to make a big investment in technology and essentially be able to do anything any firm nationwide can do in terms of technology," Gaskins says.

Computers were the first thing the partners bought, Maloney says, and they're wiring their new offices on the 20th floor of Charlotte Plaza with high-speed access lines.

The partners also hope to offer more reasonable rates than other litigation firms competing for the same work.

"We're going to try to have fees that aren't unduly burdened by large overhead," Maloney says.

Several of the attorneys creating the new firm were members of Kilpatrick Stockton's predecessor — Farris, Mallard, Cummings & Booe. That firm merged with Petree, Stockton, Robinson, Vaughn, Glaze & Maready of Winston-Salem to form Petree, Stockton & Robinson in 1986.

The firm grew again in 1996 when it merged with Atlanta's Kilpatrick & Cody to form a 370-lawyer firm that is now Kilpatrick Stockton. Kilpatrick Stockton has

more than 500 attorneys in eight states and three European offices.

Those mergers brought big changes to the original firm's culture.

Over time, several original Farris Mallard partners have left Kilpatrick Stockton. Last year, Ray Farris joined Johnston, Allison & Hord, and Mike Booe joined Kennedy Covington Lobdell & Hickman.

The latest move provides the attorneys a chance to recreate the collegial culture many enjoyed years ago, Maloney says.

In recent years, consolidation has been the watchword as mega-firms gobbled up smaller firms. Then, boutique firms comprised of lawyers with longstanding reputations discovered there was a niche for more focused practices, and they began spinning off from larger firms.

This isn't the first group to spin off from Kilpatrick Stockton. Five lawyers left its Winston-Salem office in January to set up a firm that focuses on estate planning, wills, trusts and taxation.

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