

DAILY BUSINESS REVIEW

BUSINESS OF LAW 'The timing seemed right'

Becker & Poliakoff opens D.C. office

by Julie Kay
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Becker & Poliakoff is marching toward becoming a national law firm, opening an office in Washington with two former congressional staffers as lobbyists.

The launch follows the opening of a second New Jersey office in Morristown, New Jersey, by the Fort Lauderdale-based law firm.

While other law firms have been contracting, "we are planning on growing all our offices," said Alan Becker, managing partner of Becker & Poliakoff.

The firm hired two nonlawyer lobbyists, Omar Franco, who will serve as managing director, and Clarence L. Williams, to run the Washington office, which opened this month at 815 Connecticut Ave., near the U.S. Chamber of Commerce.

Franco served as chief of staff to Republican U.S. Rep. Mario Diaz-Balart and most recently ran Franco Government Lobbying, which served as the lead lobbyist for Florida Gulf Coast University, Secure Wrap, Medical HealthCare Plans and the cities of Hialeah, Miami Lakes and North Bay Village. The Miami Republican was a member of the National Hispanic Working Group for the Bush/Cheney 2004 re-election campaign and is an active member of the Republicans Associated for Mutual Support.

For eight years, Williams was chief of staff to former Democratic U.S. Rep. Kendrick Meek, managing the 22-member staff for the Miami Democrat. Williams holds a top secret security clearance from the Defense Department and previously worked for Moffitt Hart &

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ALAN BECKER, MANAGING PARTNER
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Herron of Tallahassee, which merged with Akerman Senterfitt.

Becker said he decided to open the Washington office after a client introduced him to Franco. The firm already has a significant Tallahassee lobbying practice and a large government relations department.

The fact that a former Becker lawyer, Marco Rubio, is now in the U.S. Senate and his former chief of staff still works

for the firm also played into the decision.

"We've never done Washington, D.C., and people have always said, 'Why don't you do Washington?'" Becker said. "It never made sense before, but so much of the action has moved to Washington and just about everything now involves federal funding and federal regulation. We have existing clients who were happy to have us in that market. The stars aligned. The timing seemed right."

The New Jersey office opened this month and is Becker's second in the Garden State. The first office opened in Red Bank. The Morristown office was needed to serve nearby condominium associations, Becker said. The firm's key practice area nationally is representation of condominium associations. The office is headed by partner Dave Ramsey, who brought along associate Jennifer Lohiac.

The firm also added three litigators in its New York office last month.

Becker & Poliakoff now has more than 125 attorneys in 13 Florida offices, New York, New Jersey, the Bahamas and Prague.

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BECKER & POLIAKOFF

Based: Fort Lauderdale

Founded: 1973

Number of attorneys: 125

Florida offices: Boca Raton, Fort Myers, Fort Walton Beach, Homestead, Key West, Melbourne, Naples, Orlando, Port St. Lucie, Sarasota, Tallahassee, Tampa, West Palm Beach

Other offices: Morristown and Red Bank, New Jersey; Nassau, Bahamas; New York; Prague, Czech Republic; Washington

Managing partner: Alan Becker