

Murphy Sheneman partners launch insolvency practice

By Alexei Oreskovic

RECORDER STAFF WRITER

A managing partner of former San Francisco bankruptcy boutique Murphy Sheneman Julian & Rogers launched her own insolvency practice along with two of the firm's other partners.

Friedman Dumas & Springwater opened its doors April 21, two months after Murphy Sheneman officially merged with Chicago's Winston & Strawn.

The three founders, Ellen Friedman, Cecily Dumas and Jane Springwater, were unable to join 800-attorney Winston & Strawn because of a client conflict, said Dumas.

As the managing partner of Murphy Sheneman's San Francisco office, Dumas was involved in merger discussions with Winston & Strawn, and was expecting that the conflict could be resolved. "Had a conflict not arisen, we would have each been pleased to join Winston & Strawn," she said.

Once it became clear that the client could not go to Winston & Strawn, however, "it became an opportunity to set up a shop around [the client] and some of our other existing clients," Dumas explained.

Dumas would not say which client created the conflict, other than that it was a fairly significant client of the Murphy Sheneman firm. According to Friedman Dumas & Springwater's announcement, the new firm counts Cisco Systems Inc.,

Hewlett-Packard Co. and Fireman's Fund among its clients.

"Ellen, Cecily and Jane are excellent lawyers, and we consider them a valuable part of HP's legal team," said Hewlett-Packard Corporate Counsel Anne Kennelly in a statement.

In addition to the three founding partners, the new firm currently has two senior counsel and one associate. Dumas expects the firm to hire another four associates by the end of the year.

The new firm, located in San Francisco's financial district, handles all aspects of business bankruptcies, from Chapter 11 cases to out-of-court workouts. Friedman and Springwater also have significant experience in commercial lending.

Dumas acknowledged that the boutique's small size and limited practice areas will keep it out of the running to represent debtors in the biggest Chapter 11 cases. "Probably we won't get the call for American Airlines," said Dumas.

But she said there were plenty of medium-sized to large corporations that are comfortable hiring a boutique firm to represent them in bankruptcy.

"We did it successfully before as Murphy Sheneman," said Dumas. "It can be done in this market."

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