

Morgan Lewis Picks Up Sidley Austin Employment Team In LA

By Vin Gurrieri

Law360 (February 4, 2019, 9:57 PM EST) -- Morgan Lewis & Bockius LLP has bolstered its employment ranks in Los Angeles by adding an eight-lawyer team from Sidley Austin LLP that includes three partners with deep backgrounds in class action litigation, the firm announced Monday.

Attorneys Douglas Hart, Jennifer Zargarof and Max Fischer will each join Morgan Lewis as partners. The three-partner team will be joined by two of counsel and three associates. The firm declined to identify the of counsel since they haven't all officially started yet, but said the three associates who have already started at the firm are Anahi Gonzalez, Meghan McDonough and Sonia Vucetic.

Hart, a Law360 Employment MVP with nearly three decades of experience, told Law360 on Monday that he considers Morgan Lewis to be "the premium labor and employment practice in the country, if not the world," and that "it just made a lot of sense" for the trio to join the firm since it has proven itself capable of offering top-tier services for the type of high-profile clients they typically work with.

"We practiced labor and employment law at a very high level and we represented national companies and international companies with some of their biggest litigation," Hart said. "What we found the more we talked to Morgan Lewis was they really have figured out how to provide excellent services for those types of clients [and] those types of cases for a national and even a globally integrated basis."

Hart and Zargarof joined Sidley Austin together in July 2010 from Sheppard Mullin Richter & Hampton LLP. Fischer practiced at Sidley Austin for 18 years before moving to Morgan Lewis.

Hart, who said the group's niche is handling large-scale class action litigation in all areas of employment, including wage cases and benefits cases, said the earlier move to Sidley Austin from Sheppard Mullin has given him and Zargarof a sense of what to expect when shifting a large practice across firms.



Douglas Hart



Jennifer Zargarof



Max Fischer

“It allows us to understand that there’s a transition period and we’ll get through it and everything will be OK. I think it gives us a lot of patience with ... the process and allows us to work with our new colleagues and the staff to get through all of the hurdles that are involved with these transitions in a methodical and low-key way, which I think is important for everybody,” Hart said.

Zargarof, meanwhile, joins Morgan Lewis after having served as co-leader of Sidley Austin’s worldwide labor and employment department.

In addition to a wide variety of class actions, she also maintains a robust counseling practice in which she works with employers on a wide array of employers’ personnel policies, which she says is a key component to what she, Hart and Fischer offer their clients.

“While we do specialize in the high-impact, complex litigation, from my perspective we are still a one-stop shop with respect to employment needs,” Zargarof said on Monday. “We all spend a significant amount of time in an advice and counsel role with clients for whatever employment issues they have, large and small, so that we can help eliminate and solve problems whatever they may be.”

Like Hart and Zargarof, Fischer also maintains a hefty class action portfolio. His practice also includes matters related to the Employee Retirement Income Security Act as well as traditional labor disputes, among other things.

Fischer told Law360 that the trio also often help clients facing “crisis management” scenarios, saying an his time has been increasingly devoted to helping clients resolve workplace issues concerning the treatment of women amid the #MeToo movement, “both with the goal toward ensuring fairness and equity in compliance with the law as well as potential negative publicity and damage to the brand that can occur when those types of issues surface.”

“That continues to be a very robust part of my practice as well as Jennifer’s — she and I frequently partner together on those types of matters,” Fischer said.

Hart, Zargarof and Fischer each “have a long track record of successfully representing employers on complex and significant matters in California and across the United States, and now they will put their formidable skills and knowledge to work for our clients,” firm chair Jami McKeon said in a statement Monday.

Employment practice chair Grace Speights offered a similar sentiment, saying Monday that the firm’s clients “will particularly gain” from their knowledge of the intricacies of California’s employment mandates, especially their “wide-ranging experience in the critical area of wage-and-hour class-based litigation.”

Morgan Lewis’ hiring of Hart, Zargarof and Fischer come amid a string of recent high-profile additions to the firm’s employment team.

In October, the firm brought onboard Susan Harthill, who served the previous four years as the U.S. Department of Labor's Deputy Solicitor of Labor for National Operations, one of the highest career positions within the agency's Office of the Solicitor.

In 2017, the firm brought back former National Labor Relations Board chairman Philip Miscimarra for a second stint at the firm after his term on the labor board expired, joining former NLRB member Harry Johnson, who similarly joined the firm in 2015 after his tenure on the NLRB came to an end. Johnson currently practices at one of Morgan Lewis' Los Angeles-area offices.

--Editing by Alanna Weissman.