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Introducing

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This Louisiana firm grew up alongside its clients

Its founders were looking for a less cut-throat environment; they prospered by following clients' needs.



KEAN MILLER'S LEONARD KILGORE III, LEFT, AND G. BLANE CLARK JR.

Kean Miller

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BY MATTHEW HUISMAN

Kean Miller grew up around the chemical, oil and gas industries in Louisiana. As the needs of its clients have changed, so has the firm's expertise. "We have developed our practice areas around our clients' needs," said partner Blane Clark Jr. "We try harder to please the client."

It appears to be working. Olin

Corp., which manufactures chemicals and ammunition, started using Kean Miller on litigation it inherited when it acquired Pioneer Cos. Inc., which manufactures industrial bleaches, in 2007, said Stuart Roth, senior deputy general counsel and vice president. Olin has used the firm ever since.

"One of the things that are particularly impressive to me is

the pragmatism they show and the concern for client money," Roth said. "We think of the firms that we use—like Kean Miller—as a partner. And we expect those firms to be thinking as if they were partially in-house counsel at Olin."

The firm boasts a client list that includes Exxon Mobil Corp., ConocoPhillips, Dell Inc., Lamar Advertising Co., Sonic Drive-Ins

Inc., Frontier Drilling LLC, Verizon Communications Inc., Valero Energy Co., Shell Oil Co. and BP America Inc.

It prides itself on charging competitive rates and has developed specialized practice groups to fit the needs of clients in areas including maritime law, offshore commercial oil and gas development, health care and intellectual property. The workload comprises about 50 percent litigation, 25 percent transactional and 25 percent regulatory work. There are four offices—two in Baton Rouge, one in Lake Charles, La., and one in New Orleans.

The firm was founded in 1983 by nine lawyers who split from Baton Rouge firm Sanders, Downing, Kean and Cazedessus. Among those who left was partner Leonard Kilgore III, who said the inspiration for the group to strike out on its own was to create a more friendly culture, in which partners didn't fight over clients and where service reigned supreme. "We are a true partnership," Kilgore said. "All of our financial data is available to all of our partners."

That commitment to clients and transparency has allowed the firm to grow to 127 full-time equivalencies. Much of that growth came during the 1980s, tapering off subsequently into a steady rate of growth as the firm takes on additional attorneys that fit its needs.

SURPASSED EXPECTATIONS

"I think we far surpassed our expectations," Kilgore said. "Our practice has followed our clients' needs, rather than arbitrarily or artificially stock our shelves with clients."

The firm has no immediate plans to open up shop outside Louisiana, Kilgore said, but has teamed up with large national firms on major litigation. The majority of the firms' clients are based outside Louisiana but have specific needs within the state.

"There are certain legal issues that require a local or regional ear to the ground," Kilgore said.

One of the specialities that is fairly unique to Louisiana is legacy litigation, mostly related to orphan oil and gas wells. As larger energy companies gobbled up smaller ones, they inherited litigation related to contamination and remediation.

Kean Miller has grown its legacy-litigation practice as regulation from state and federal agencies has tightened. The firm believes that this line of work complements its environmental regulatory and litigation practices. Another practice area that has seen considerable growth relates to the offshore oil and gas industry.

According to Clark, the firm values any business that its clients need done—no matter how great or small. "We want to represent clients for however long we exist," Clark said.

Clark himself started at Kean Miller in 1984 as an associate, fresh out of law school. Since there were only 18 attorneys at

the time, he was expected to share in the workload and managerial responsibilities. He served on the interview committee and later the management committee. Starting next year, he'll take over from Gary Bezet as managing partner.

"This year is a transition year, so I'm sort of getting my feet wet," Clark said. "We have a great firm, a great culture and great staff. If anything, I see it as one of my biggest opportunities to take our culture and our people to attract other lateral candidates."

Matthew Huisman can be reached at mhuisman@alm.com.

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