

5 Cox Smith Pros Launch Boutique Energy Firm Amid Merger

By Paul DeBenedetto

Law360, Houston (April 1, 2015, 6:35 PM EDT) -- Five former Cox Smith Matthews Inc. lawyers will form their own boutique oil and gas firm in Texas on the heels of merger news between Cox Smith and Dykema Gossett PLLC.

Former Cox Smith shareholders Paul Santoyo, Katy Pier Moore and Corey F. Wehmeyer will head up the new firm Santoyo Moore Wehmeyer PC, a boutique exclusively dedicated to Texas oil and gas clients. They will be joined by Christopher West and Benjamin Robertson, two former associates in the Cox Smith oil, gas and energy group, the new firm announced Wednesday.

The firm said it plans to use "big firm experience" with an alternative to the pricing structure of larger firms, and will dedicate itself exclusively to the state of Texas.

"We're from Texas and intend to remain focused here," read a statement from Moore. "My colleagues and I founded this firm because we take those roots seriously. We're committed to serving clients dealing with Texas issues in areas such as the Eagle Ford Shale and the Permian Basin."

Wehmeyer will head the firm's energy litigation and arbitration practice, assisted by Robertson, while Moore continues her practice of counseling operators, working interest owners and others, with West's help, the firm said. Santoyo will continue his title and due diligence practice.

A spokesman for the group said that they had each worked closely at Cox Smith on energy matters, eventually deciding to strike out on their own, and that the merger did not have a significant impact on their decision.

Santoyo Moore Wehmeyer's office will be located in San Antonio, and it will specialize in upstream acquisitions and divestitures, leasing and operational counsel, due diligence, exploration and production financing, high stakes commercial energy and real property litigation and arbitration and title examination, the firm said.

The move comes just two days after the companies announced their May 1 merger, which will create a more than 450-lawyer firm with 15 offices concentrated in Michigan, Illinois and Texas.

The firm, which also has offices in Minneapolis, Los Angeles and Washington, D.C., will continue to operate under the Dykema name, but in Texas, will conduct operations as Dykema Cox Smith through at

least January 2017, allowing for continuity while the Dykema name builds brand recognition in Texas. Dykema's 330 lawyers are joined by 118 attorneys at Cox Smith, a 75-year-old firm based in San Antonio.

The firms had gone through informal negotiations for about a year after lawyers at Dykema's Texas offices recommended CEO Peter Kellett reach out to Cox Smith, where some of their former colleagues were working. Kellett and Cox Smith managing director Deborah Williamson later met, finding no client conflicts and complimentary practice areas, as well as sharing feedback from clients that they wanted services the other firm provided.

The two firms also saw the other as having encouraging financials, shared rate structures and hours, and shared a culture and attitude toward client services, they each said.

The two came to an agreement after a series of conversations.

— Editing by Ben Guilfoy.