

Five Partners Start Majority Women-Owned Firm

By **Jesse Greenspan**, jesse.greenspan@portfoliomedia.com

Monday, May 12, 2008 --- Five Dallas-based partners from some of the largest law firms in the United States have joined together to create a majority women-owned firm that will specialize in labor and employment law, litigation, business immigration and dispute resolution.

The new firm, Spencer Crain Cabbage Healy & McNamara PLLC, officially opened its doors on May 1. Its office is located on the 41st floor of the Renaissance Tower in Dallas.

“We’re thrilled,” said Gayla C. Crain, a founding shareholder who came to the firm from Epstein Becker & Green PC. “It’s not often that you see five founding partners move out of very large firms to do something like this.”

“We’re going to bring the best practices from the four firms we came from in terms of client services, client representation and, also, managing a law firm,” she added.

Crain is joined at the firm by Jennifer J. Spencer, previously of Fulbright & Jaworski LLP; Brenda T. Cabbage, previously of Greenberg Traurig LLP; Larry J. McNamara, previously of Locke Lord Bissell & Liddell LLP; and Elise A. Healy, previously of Epstein Becker.

The firm will also start out with a nonequity shareholder, two associates and a couple of contracts lawyers.

Crain and McNamara specialize in labor and employment law, Spencer and Cabbage specialize in commercial litigation, including product liability litigation, and Healy is an immigration lawyer.

Crain said that she and McNamara would be doing work across the board, from discrimination cases and class actions to noncompetes and arbitrations.

Though both have practices more geared toward the employment side of things than the labor side, McNamara said it was unusual for attorneys in Dallas to do any traditional labor work at all.

“Unions tend not to be frequent here,” McNamara said. “Folks who can do it all from the labor and employment standpoint are pretty rare here and getting rarer every day.”

Though not all five of the founding shareholders knew each other before

starting up at Spencer Crain, each of them knew at least one of the other attorneys.

Spencer was the first to come up with the idea of a majority woman-owned firm, and McNamara helped put her in touch with Crain and Healy. She knew Cubbage, on the other hand, because they were both on the board of the Dallas Girl Scouts, according to McNamara.

“We were all within several degrees of each other,” he said.

Many of the attorneys' clients have followed them to Spencer Crain, the firm said, including Eli Lilly and Co., Greyhound Lines Inc., Hexter-Fair Title Co., Kennington Capital and JCPenney Co. Inc.

“The JCPenney legal department has enjoyed working with Gayla Crain over the years on important HR litigation matters,” said Celeste Flippen, senior managing counsel at JCPenney. “We appreciate her dogged determination, candor and practical advice, as well as her willingness to partner with us to achieve our desired results.”

According to McNamara, one advantage of starting a new firm is that the group can now be much more flexible regarding rates. Crain added that having a majority women-owned firm was advantageous because corporations were “extremely sensitive to diversity issues these days.”

“I think you'll hear more great things from us,” Crain said.