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**DAILY BUSINESS REVIEW**

# These South Florida Law Firms Merged, Opened and Dissolved in 2021

Merge or die was the reality for several Florida boutiques, while midsize and Big Law firms found opportunities in adding regional practices.



Actuate Law moved into the 545 Wyn building in Wynwood this year. Courtesy rendering

## What You Need to Know

- Boutiques and midsize firms found dance partners with complementary practice areas in 2021.
- Succession issues contributed to at least one merger, while others cited a need to scale up to stay competitive.
- Out-of-state law firms followed their clients to South Florida, opening offices focused on real estate, corporate work, estate planning, and technology.

A vibrant year in the South Florida legal community saw new law firms sprout from local practices, out-of-state firms expand to the region, several mergers, a Big Law acquisition, and an ultimately fortunate dissolution.



The stories behind those headlines paint the picture of a legal market that rewarded scale and opportunism, the latter characteristic acting to level the playing field for a handful of recent market entrants who weren't afraid to try their luck amid rising competition.

### **Firm Openings**

South Florida's newest law firms align with the region's fastest-growing practice areas. Corporate and real estate practices at out-of-state firms followed their clientele to the Sunshine State. So did trusts and estates attorneys and health care-focused law firms, capitalizing on Florida's growing and aging population. And a tech-oriented law firm from Chicago found a few good reasons to open shop in Wynwood.

In November, New York business law firm **Falcon Rappaport & Berkman** hired Boca Raton trusts and estates attorney Kenneth Falcon to open its Boca Raton office after watching clients move to Florida or purchase second homes in the state.

The same month, business law firm **DGIM Law** opened in Aventura with former Bilzin Sumberg Baena Price & Axelrod attorney Daniel Gielchinsky and former Berger Singerman attorney Isaac Marcushammer. The pair specialize in commercial litigation and bankruptcy, leveraging their experience in both areas to see distressed real estate assets through restructuring.

Also in November, the Chicago-based, technology-oriented **Actuate Law** announced the opening of a Wynwood office with a team of intellectual property lawyers and a portion of the staff of Quintec, the firm's artificial intelligence legal compliance subsidiary.

"With the time and investment Mayor [Francis] Suarez has put into the Miami tech ecosystem, it didn't make sense for us not to be here," said managing partner Dara Tarkowski in a November interview.



Former White & Case attorneys Colleen Grady and Lauren Hunt in July launched **Grady Hunt**, a Coral Gables business and real estate firm. Both lawyers were most recently partners at the Miami corporate boutique Alvarez & Diaz-Silveira.

And in February, the family law firm Johnson, Ritchey & Feldman launched an alternative dispute resolution offshoot dubbed the **Florida Collaborative Law Group**. In a February interview, accredited collaborative attorney Christen Ritchey said the process of collaborative law can preserve relationships and assets more effectively than litigation.

### **Mergers and Acquisitions**

Succession and synergy defined merger activity as opportunistic boutiques found complementary practices and stability in peer firms.

The most recent merger, though, was more of an acquisition. In September, the Pennsylvania-based Am Law 200 firm **Cozen O'Connor** acquired two Boca Raton boutiques, The Morris Law Group and Elder Law Associates PA. The probate and trusts and estates attorneys said their practices filled a niche for Cozen, which also has offices in Miami and West Palm Beach.

In May, 31-lawyer **Nason, Yeager, Gerson, Harris & Fumero** merged with nine-lawyer **Haile Shaw & Pfaffenberger**, with the latter firm's attorneys joining Nason Yeager's recently expanded Palm Beach Gardens office. Plans for the merger began in 2019 following the retirement of all three of Haile Shaw's namesake partners, but the pandemic delayed the deal's finalization.

In Coral Gables, the merger of five-lawyer **Golden & Grimes** and eight-lawyer **Wallen Kelley** created a 13-lawyer Coral Gables litigation boutique, which goes by Wallen Kelley. The April merger should strengthen Wallen Kelley's booming first-party property insurance litigation practice, said partner Todd Wallen.

And in early March, South Florida law firms **Marshall Grant** and **Rice Pugatch Robinson Storfer & Cohen** combined to form Lorium PLLC, a 20-lawyer firm with locations in Fort Lauderdale, Boca



Raton, Pensacola, North Carolina, and Chicago. Members Craig Pugatch and Adam Marshall said the firms' complementary practices—bankruptcy, intellectual property, and M&A—motivated them to merge firms.

### **A Happy Dissolution**

In January, Miami litigation boutique **Solowsky & Allen** called it quits after 30 years—but not before its six attorneys joined nearby banking, real estate and commercial litigation firm **Krinzman Huss Lubetsky Feldman & Hotte**. Former Solowsky partner and class action litigator Mason Pertnoy said the move was in the works before the COVID-19 pandemic.

“Both firms were looking to find ways to grow because if you’re a small firm in Miami and you’re not finding continuous ways to grow, you become stagnant, and that becomes problematic,” Pertnoy said in a January interview. “The conversation turned to, ‘What if we could put our people together?’”

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