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Big Tobacco Defender Leaves King & Spalding to Launch Plaintiffs Firm

After eight years battling smoker suits against R. J. Reynolds at trial, Bethany Schneider said she asked herself, "Am I going to be a big-firm lawyer or do something else?"

By Meredith Hobbs | February 21, 2018



Bethany Schneider, Schneider Law, Atlanta (Photo: John Disney/ ALM)

After gaining extensive courtroom experience on **King & Spalding's** (<https://www.law.com/law-firm-profile?id=172&name=King-%26-Spalding>) tobacco trial team, **Bethany Schneider** started her own plaintiffs shop, **Schneider Law**, on Monday.

"I'm at the point in my life where I've got to figure out what my purpose is," said Schneider, who is 33. "Am I going to be a big-firm lawyer or do something else?"

Schneider had been working on the tobacco trials—the Engle progeny litigation

(<http://www.publichealthlawcenter.org/sites/default/files/resources/tclc-fs-engle-progeny-2015.pdf>) that King & Spalding handles in South Florida for R. J. Reynolds Tobacco Co.—since they started heating up in 2010. She joined the firm in 2009 after law school at the University of Texas.

Schneider, who'd been a senior associate at King & Spalding, worked on 24 trials in the last eight years, serving as second or third chair for 11 of them.

The outcomes, she said, have ranged from full defense verdicts to multimillion-dollar plaintiffs verdicts—including a recent one for \$42 million.

“As somebody who’s been involved in some of the most challenging litigation in the country, I can use some of that fearlessness on the other side,” she said. “After defending tobacco companies that have a bunch of strikes against them, there is no case that I would feel fearful to try.”

Schneider said she jumped at the chance to gain trial experience after RJR engaged King & Spalding, volunteering to take the Florida bar exam to get in on the ground floor with the new tobacco team.

“I was given a lot of good opportunities,” she said, adding that W. Ray Persons, a well-known trial lawyer at the firm, has been a mentor.

But now, she said, “I want to defend the little guy, the David,” adding that her “Goliath” training and skills from King & Spalding will help.

“I know the defense playbook,” Schneider said. She said she’s interested in all types of cases, including catastrophic personal injury and wrongful death.

Schneider also thinks she has more of a plaintiffs lawyer personality. “The defense side is supposed to be about defusing passion and calming things down,” she explained. “But my drive, ambition, passion and emotion—those are the characteristics that make me a great lawyer. I don’t want to stifle the things that I think are going to be my greatest strength as a plaintiffs lawyer.”

About 1½ years ago, when former King & Spalding partner Bradley Pratt opened his own plaintiffs firm in fall 2016, Schneider said, she started thinking about going to the plaintiffs side.

“I felt like I was at a point in my life where I could take a leap and deal with the instability for a time,” said Schneider, who is financing her new venture with savings.

Her younger sister, Meredith Schneider, is relocating to Atlanta for a promotion and moving in with the newly minted plaintiffs lawyer and her Maltese rescue dog, Einstein, which will help with her mortgage.

Schneider is leasing space from a more established plaintiffs firm, Conley Griggs Partin, which has attracted a number of high-profile personal injury firms, including [Penn Law](https://www.law.com/dailyreportonline/sites/dailyreportonline/2017/10/12/trial-lawyer-penn-gets-out-from-in-between-harris-and-lowry-and-other-on-the-move-news/) (<https://www.law.com/dailyreportonline/sites/dailyreportonline/2017/10/12/trial-lawyer-penn-gets-out-from-in-between-harris-and-lowry-and-other-on-the-move-news/>) and Montgomery-based [Beasley Allen](https://www.law.com/dailyreportonline/almID/1202778766410/plaintiffs-powerhouse-beasley-allen-makes-a-bet-on-atlanta/) (<https://www.law.com/dailyreportonline/almID/1202778766410/plaintiffs-powerhouse-beasley-allen-makes-a-bet-on-atlanta/>), to its building at 4200 Northside Parkway.

She had crossed paths with one of that firm’s partners, Ranse Partin, at King & Spalding, before he left in late 2010 to [open his own plaintiffs shop](https://www.law.com/almID/1202616382893/) (<https://www.law.com/almID/1202616382893/>), and he offered her space in the building.

Outside of work, Schneider is on the advisory council for New American Pathways, a national nonprofit which helps refugees become citizens.

BRIEFLY

Troutman Sanders (<https://www.law.com/law-firm-profile?id=311&name=Troutman-Sanders>) has landed three lawyers and a consultant from **Dentons (<https://www.law.com/law-firm-profile?id=285&name=Dentons>)**—litigators **Jim Manley**, who joined as a partner, and **Jill Kuhn** as counsel in Atlanta, real estate partner **Randal Lejuwaan** in San Diego, and **Joe Mohorovic** as senior consultant. Mohorovic, who is practicing out of Troutman’s Washington and Chicago offices, had been a commissioner with the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission until joining Dentons (<https://www.law.com/nationallawjournal/sites/nationallawjournal/2017/10/18/snags-joseph-mohorovic-republican-at-consumer-product-agency/>) in October.

Manley and Kuhn, who practice together, handle high-exposure torts, catastrophic injuries, consumer product safety and product liability matters, as well as business disputes. “With their addition, we continue to expand our litigation bench strength in Atlanta,” said Troutman’s Atlanta managing partner, Pete Robinson, in a statement. Troutman has more than 180 lawyers in its business litigation practice, according to the firm.

Buddy Darden has also left **Dentons**, where he was senior counsel, and is joining plaintiffs firm **Pope McGlamry** as counsel. Darden joined what was then Long Aldridge & Norman in 1995 after representing Cobb County in the U.S. House of Representatives for 11 years. “I have nothing but the greatest respect” for Dentons, Darden said. At Pope McGlamry, Darden added, he expects to work “relatively limited hours,” often on qui tam and other federal litigation with former federal prosecutor **Michael Moore**.

Polsinelli (<https://www.law.com/law-firm-profile?id=1823&name=Polsinelli>) has added two shareholders in its Atlanta office: **Sarah Hawk** and **Leslie Spasser**. Hawk has joined Polsinelli's immigration and workforce mobility practice from **Ogletree, Deakins, Nash, Smoak & Stewart** (<https://www.law.com/law-firm-profile?id=512&name=Ogletree-Deakins>). "Sarah is well-known throughout the immigration community—locally and across the U.S.," said Nancy Rafuse, who heads Polsinelli's national labor and employment practice.

Spasser, who has almost 30 years' experience advising on tech transactions, joined from **Bodker, Ramsey, Andrews, Winograd & Wildstein**. She counsels clients on everything from software licensing and cloud computing to outsourcing agreements. Her experience includes seven years in-house at Cox Communications and The Weather Channel.

Their additions give Polsinelli's Atlanta office 15 shareholders and a total of 27 lawyers. The office has tripled in size since Polsinelli launched it with a team of lawyers (<https://www.law.com/almID/1202633304022/>) from **Rafuse, Hill & Hodges** just over four years ago.

Shawn Rafferty has joined **Eversheds Sutherland** as a partner from **Barnes & Thornburg** (<https://www.law.com/law-firm-profile?id=25&name=Barnes-%26-Thornburg-LLP>). Rafferty, who joined the corporate group's private capital team, is a finance lawyer for the aviation and transportation industries. He helps both U.S. and international clients with equipment financing, particularly for airlines and aviation industry investors and lenders, and with disputes that may arise from financing deals.

Rafferty's "extensive transactional and dispute resolution experience adds significantly to our national and global capabilities," said Eversheds Sutherland co-CEO Mark Wasserman in a statement.

T. Peyton Bell has left litigation defense firm **Carlock, Copeland and Stair** to join plaintiffs firm **Harris Lowry Manton** as an associate. Bell is working on product liability, wrongful death, personal injury and business torts cases. Bell, who is from Augusta, is a 2015 graduate of the University of Georgia School of Law, where he received the Willis J. "Dick" Richardson Jr. Award for Outstanding Trial Advocacy and the William King Meadow Award for integrity and legal ethics. He served as a press secretary for former **U.S. Rep. John Barrow**, D-Ga., before law school.

Katherine "Kadie" D'Ambrosio has joined **Rogers & Hardin** as an associate in the litigation practice after clerking for **Judge Beverly Martin** of the **U.S. Court of Appeals for the Eleventh Circuit**. D'Ambrosio, a 2012 graduate of Yale University Law School, has also served as a Yale Public Interest Fellow at the **Georgia Advocacy Office**, where she represented people with disabilities in federal court, and as a clerk for **Justice Walter Carpeneti** of the **Alaska Supreme Court**.

Rogers & Hardin has also promoted **Michael Eber** to partner, as of Jan. 1, 2018. Eber, a litigator, recently won two multimillion-dollar appeals in the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit on behalf of companies seeking to recover damages from the Deepwater Horizon oil spill. Eber defended an almost \$60 million judgment under the Deepwater Horizon Economic and Property Damages Settlement and convinced the Fifth Circuit to vacate and remand denial of a \$4 million claim.

Commercial real estate firm **Pursley Friese Torgrimson** has hired **Michelle Woodward** to serve as its first chief operating officer from **Chamberlain, Hrdlicka, White, Williams & Aughtry**. At Chamberlain, Woodward was in charge of operations for the tax controversy department.

