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Jumping into Hot Startup Market, Michael Best Absorbs Austin Boutique

Texas Lawyer

The addition of three lawyers from Austin's RWR Legal is part of Michael Best & Friedrich's expansion of its "Venture Best" practice.

As part of a strategy to expand its emerging company practice in Austin and nationally, Am Law 200 firm Michael Best & Friedrich combined with start-up boutique RWR Legal in Austin, adding three corporate and securities lawyers.

Shari Wynne Ressler, founder of RWR Legal, joined Michael Best as a partner in Austin on Feb. 17, along with her husband, Rick Ressler, who is now managing partner of the eight-lawyer office, and senior counsel Stephen Aguilar.

Austin has been a hotbed for start-up activity, and Michael Best is one of numerous out-of-state firms to show an increased interest in Texas. The firm is executing on a plan to build out its "Venture Best" practice, in which it counsels entrepreneurs, investors, emerging companies and new startups.

Shawn Stigler, a partner in Boulder, Colorado, and co-chair of the practice, said about 50 lawyers in offices around the firm do work for entrepreneurs and investors. He noted plans to expand in several offices, including Austin; Chicago; Raleigh, North Carolina; Salt Lake City; and Colorado.

"We'd love the Austin office to get to 25 to 30 attorneys," he said, adding that the firm would also consider opening in Dallas, San Antonio and Houston because of the strength of the start-up community in those cities. Other potential expansion locations are Boise, Idaho; Atlanta; and cities in California, he said.

Stigler said he's been talking to lawyers from RWR Legal for a year about a combination.

"Rick and Shari are just masterful attorneys but also masterful at building community and supporting entrepreneurs and

investors. It's a great combination with our university practice," he said.

Wynne Ressler said moving their practice to the larger firm gives clients access to lawyers with a wide range of practices. Also, she said, they can maintain their rate structure at the Midwest firm.

"We share a strategic vision of growing the Austin office, and what we are doing with the emerging business practice," she said.

Wynne Ressler said she founded RWR Legal in 1996. In 2012, as an ancillary business, the firm launched its SKU Accelerator, for high-growth consumer packaged goods. The firm no longer has an interest in the accelerator, Wynne Ressler said, but she and Ressler do personally.

SKU Accelerator's success stories include Epic Provisions, a meat snack company purchased by General Mills, she said.

Over the years, Wynne Ressler said, RWR Legal has been approached by numerous larger firms, but the Michael Best opportunity was the first that made sense because of the firm's focus on work for entrepreneurs and its "value-centered" rate structure.

"We would not sacrifice the kind of capabilities, the personalized service and the resources we could bring to clients," she said.

Michael Best, based in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, has offices in 13 cities. The Austin office opened in 2016.

To read the full article, [click here](#).

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