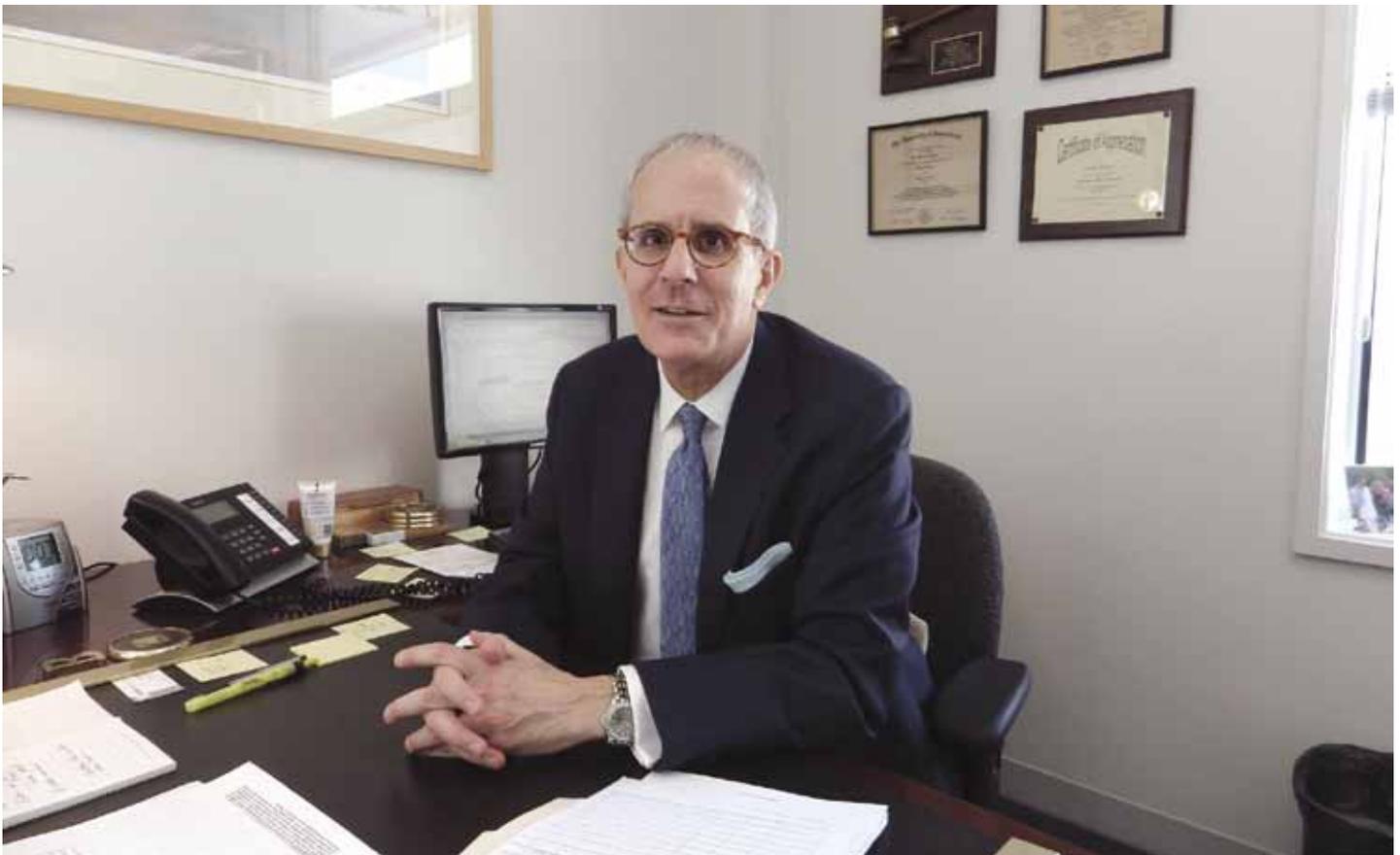


# Legal strategy for sustained growth

BERCHEM, MOSES & DEVLIN EXPANDS IN FAIRFIELD



Berchem, Moses & Devlin Managing Partner Ira Bloom in Westport.

BY BILL FALLON

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**B**erchem, Moses & Devlin P.C., with offices in Milford and Westport, merged Feb. 3 with the Norwalk firm Kimmel & Kimmel L.L.C. and also added five other lawyers practicing in diverse areas.

The firm now employs 40 attorneys, skilled in a battery of legal arenas that include land use and public sector law, serving in the latter as counsel to 25 to 30 boards of education and to a roll call of municipalities, either as town attorneys or rep-

resenting towns as needed, depending on how officials structure the arrangement. (Easton, for example, favors representation; Westport has a town attorney; both engage Berchem, Moses & Devlin.)

The firm relocated from within Westport to a bright, 5,000-square-foot office on Post Road East six months ago. The new space was a bit big at the time, but Managing Partner Ira Bloom said planning, not extravagance, was involved in the footprint.

“We took more space than we needed six months ago anticipating adding three or four more lawyers here, which we just did,” he said, seated in his office recently.

The increased presence in Fairfield County features attorneys with a focus on business services, trusts and estates, litigation, private sector labor and employment law, public sector law (including municipal and education) and family law.

The firm hires broadly in two

categories: established attorneys with their accumulated oomph and younger — though likely not brand new — lawyers. Riffing through his memory without notes, Bloom ticked off Milford, where a firm partner is city attorney; Norwalk, where another is Norwalk corporation counsel; and Ansonia, where the corporation counsel is John P. Marini, one of the new hires.

Bloom cited several examples of the “good fit” the new attorneys brought to the 80-year-old firm. Peter V. Gelderman, a Fairfield land use/municipal lawyer is one of the recent arrivals.

Gelderman will be based in the Westport office. He has served as assistant town attorney for Westport (where Bloom for 16 years has served as town attorney) and as town attorney for Trumbull. He is a former member of the Trumbull Town Council. His experience includes business and commercial transactions, commercial and residential real estate, condo law and civil litigation.

“The addition of the Kimmel & Kimmel law firm and Mr. Gelderman represents major growth for our new offices on Post Road East,” said Bloom, adding the in-town relocation would “establish a significant presence” for Berchem, Moses & Devlin in Fairfield County.

The merger with father-and-son Kimmel & Kimmel — Eugene, the father, is now senior counsel at Berchem, Moses & Devlin and son Gregory is senior partner — came after negotiations in 2013. Bloom distilled the yearlong discussions, saying, “We talked. They had interest. We had interest.” Kimmel & Kimmel brought with it a family law practice, which Berchem, Moses & Devlin until that point lacked.

Bloom himself joined the firm six years ago in a similar strategic acquisition. He was already the Westport town attorney, among other duties, when his firm, Wake See & Dimes, merged with Berchem, Moses & Devlin.

Bloom said that although the firm dates to 1933, the three named partners do not date to that era and

all still practice: Robert Berchem, Marsha Moses and Michael Devlin.

In a prepared statement, Berchem said, “These new lawyers at our firm bring a wide range of experience that will enhance service to our growing statewide client base. Our growth has always come through strategic steps aimed at improved service to clients.”

During a transition period, Kimmel & Kimmel will continue to operate its Norwalk office. In addition to divorce and family law, Kimmel & Kimmel concentrates in the areas of real estate, personal injury and criminal law.

The firm’s 32 attorneys in Milford work fluidly with the eight in Westport. As Bloom wrapped up his meeting for this story, he took a conference call from a Milford-office attorney on a Westport issue. “They come here or we go there,” he said. “There are 40 of us; it’s just that eight of us work here.”

Facts and figures and concerns for new hires are only part of a conversation with Bloom. He is married and the father of two grown children, each of whom has pursued higher education, though neither is an attorney. The framed print above his desk is of Taos Pueblo by Georgia O’Keeffe and he briefly shares his enthusiasm for both O’Keeffe and the pueblo, which he has visited.

Bloom, by his admission, reads a lot: often technical material. His field is changing, he said, and he must keep up. Beyond that, “I’m interested in this as a lawyer.”

Competitive pressures come from next door, from other states and from other countries, he said. And Berchem Moses & Devlin will continue to look for strategic talent. “It’s a changing world and it’s changing very quickly. You have to keep up with it.”