

Why Jackson Lewis Landed In Riverside, Calif.

By Rachel Rippetoe

Law360 (October 26, 2021, 10:13 AM EDT) -- Jackson Lewis PC announced last week it has opened its seventh office in California, in the city of Riverside.

Law360 caught up with firmwide managing principal Samantha Hoffman and the office's new managing principal Nicole Shaffer to talk about why the firm chose Riverside as its next Golden State destination and why the legal market in the desert city is heating up.

Why was Riverside in particular a lucrative place to open an office? What about this market made it a worthwhile investment?

Nicole Shaffer: California continues to be a significant priority for the firm, as we support our clients across the state. While we've serviced our clients' needs in the Inland Empire — which includes Riverside County and San Bernardino County, basically from the border of Orange County all the way to Arizona — from our surrounding Southern California offices, the demand for our services in that area made opening an office there a strategic priority for the firm.

We landed on Riverside given the vibrant downtown, proximity to the courthouse, and ease with which to support the rest of the area. With Riverside as our seventh office in the state, we continue to expand our geographic capabilities, providing our clients with an even broader reach within the state.

Why now, for the opening?

Shaffer: As the country and the state are opening back up, and people continue to return to the office, the time is right to have a physical presence in Riverside.

The firm brought several attorneys over to the new location. What went into deciding who would work out of Riverside?

Samantha Hoffman: Our Orange County office has grown threefold in the last decade. As we looked at how to best support our clients' needs in the Inland Empire, the firm made the strategic decision to start recruiting for talented attorneys in the IE, as we looked to develop a local team to handle that work, and supplement the work the OC attorneys were doing in the IE.



Samantha Hoffman



Nicole Shaffer

Initially back in 2018, when I was still office managing principal in Orange County, our idea was to have a satellite office in the IE that I would manage from afar. Nicole, who has been part of the Orange County office of Jackson Lewis since 2008, has been instrumental in working with me to build the Riverside team. So when she decided to move from Orange County back to the Inland Empire where she grew up and has strong ties, it made sense for her to manage the office.

Shaffer: And, while we just recently finalized our plans for physical space in Riverside — at the building off University Avenue — we've been building our Riverside team throughout the pandemic, specifically recruiting for talented attorneys to be part of building the office. For example, we were thrilled to gain legal talent Art Cunningham, a veteran litigator and trial attorney, who joined us [from Lewis Brisbois Bisgaard & Smith LLP] late last year.

Southern California's legal market is heating up right now, with lots of firms opening up new offices. What's that competition like, and how do you stand out as a litigation firm in a crowded field?

Shaffer: Yes, it's heating up, but it's heating up around the country. However, we continue to focus on providing excellent service to our clients, with talented lawyers and the breadth and scope of practice, and geographic footprint, that clients expect. We do this by focusing on recruiting high-quality lawyers and providing excellent training to them, in addition to our existing roster of our great lawyers. With a significant focus on professional development, we ensure our lawyers have the tools to provide exceptional service to our clients.

What are your business goals for the next year? What will be your metrics for success?

Hoffman: Our measure of success — for Riverside, the state of California, and for all of our 62 offices, as we view ourselves as a single firm — continues to be providing excellent service to our clients. That has always led to more work, and expansion. And we are confident that will be the case in Riverside, as well as across the firm.

Do you plan on recruiting additional attorneys for this office? What will be your value proposition for them?

Shaffer: Yes, we plan to continue expanding our team in Riverside and beyond, as the demand for our services continues to be incredibly strong. We are a firm where teamwork, collegiality and a commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion are not soundbites but woven into the fabric of the firm. We are a firm where when a colleague calls and needs your help, and asks you to work on a matter or issue for a client, the response is, absolutely, how can I help. It's not about credit or what's in it for me. It's about being a true team — a true partnership — to get the best solution and results for our clients.

Hoffman: For the Riverside office, it's also about the opportunity to be part of a new office, to help build and shape something, and put your stamp on it. Having had the opportunity to be one of the original five attorneys who opened and built the Orange County office back in 2006 — at the time I was a sixth-year associate — I can tell you it was incredibly exciting. It had a very entrepreneurial feel, with the backing of an enormous firm.

What's it like opening a new office in the pandemic?

Shaffer: Like many things during COVID, it has been interesting to say the least and certainly logistically

challenging. It took us a while to find the perfect space for our team, but luckily everyone remained patient and calm throughout the process. Over the past year and a half, I think we have all learned a lot about flexibility and showing grace for ourselves and others, and those qualities definitely came into play during this process.

As remote work is becoming more common, why was it important to have a physical space in Riverside?

Hoffman: We truly believe that law is a people business. While it has been wonderful to see how well our firm functioned remotely, we do still think that being together — safely, of course — is important to establish and rekindle the collaborative connections with our colleagues and our clients that make Jackson Lewis such a gratifying place to work.

--Editing by Nicole Bleier.