

Boutique Merger Creates Bicoastal 'Sweet Spot' In NY, Calif.

By Tracey Read

Law360 (March 3, 2025, 4:03 PM EST) -- California-based litigation boutique Bartko LLP announced Monday that it has merged with New York-based Pavia & Harcourt to create a combined 61-lawyer firm with a substantial bicoastal platform in San Francisco, Los Angeles and New York City.

The combined firm is called Bartko Pavia, and the merger became official Saturday.

In an interview Monday with Law360 Pulse, Giovanni Spinelli, New York office managing partner and head of international at Bartko Pavia, and the former managing partner of Pavia & Harcourt, said he approached Bartko's firmwide co-managing partners An Nguyen Ruda and Patrick Ryan about merging after having to refer the "umpteenth" California case to Bartko.

"I said: 'You know what? They're on the West Coast. We're in New York. We do international, they do litigation. Why don't we talk?'" Spinelli recalled. "And An and Patrick took all of 48 hours to decide to fly over. And a year ago to date, we tied it up."

The San Francisco-based Ruda, who is also CEO of Bartko Pavia, said the firms have been collaborating for years, but she wanted to make sure Pavia's values aligned with Bartko's before signing on the dotted line.

"We're all expats from big firms, and so coming to Bartko for me it was important to have that sort of guiding star of always put our clients first, but also our families first," she said. "I have never missed a single one of my son's field trips, ever, running the firm. Unless I need to, I don't work on the weekends, because that's family time. And so, in looking at someone to merge with, they had to have the same values that we had."

Like Bartko, Pavia over the years has received a lot of overtures to merge from both Mid-Law and BigLaw firms. Pavia shied away from previous offers in part because Pavia's clientele had been 80% European — and a lot of those clients would have been lost in a large-firm culture, Spinelli said.

"We think this is exactly the right sweet spot," Spinelli said. "This kind of bicoastal boutique feel is still compatible with what European clients, even the larger ones, like to see, and what they expect."



Giovanni Spinelli



An Nguyen Ruda



Patrick Ryan

Bartko was established in California in 1978. The firm handles complex business trials, intellectual property and trade secret claims, labor negotiations, employment litigation and counseling, commercial real estate transactions, and leasing and franchise disputes.

Pavia & Harcourt's ties in New York and Europe go back to 1951. Its attorneys specialize in commercial, corporate, banking, media and entertainment, real estate, litigation and arbitration, IP, estate planning and administration, and matrimonial and family law matters.

Pavia & Harcourt's American-trained attorneys are fluent in Italian, French, Spanish, Russian and Portuguese. The firm represented foreign entities and individuals who do business in the United States, as well as American clients who do business in the U.S. and abroad.

A physical presence now in both California and New York will enhance the combined firm's ability to tackle enforcement actions, government investigations and multijurisdictional cases. Pavia & Harcourt brings deep international relationships while Bartko provides a dominant U.S. litigation platform, the firm's announcement said.

Ryan, who is also Bartko Pavia's litigation head, said Bartko LLP has had some major antitrust cases in New York, so the merger will be a real benefit to the firm's national litigation practice.

"We have a national litigation practice of major complex cases all over the country," said Ryan, who is also licensed to practice law in New York. "The geographic critical mass of having a home base in New York is going to be a great benefit for our clients and our practice."

Looking ahead, Ryan said one goal is to expand the new firm's IP and antitrust litigation.

"Those are booming areas for us, and we have some really major pieces of litigation," he said. "We're working on some very big trials coming up."

For instance, at the end of April, the firm is handling a major trade secret retrial in Arkansas against Walmart on behalf of Zest Labs. In 2023, an Arkansas federal jury determined that Walmart owed \$115 million in damages for allegedly nicking the startup's trade secrets related to shelf-freshness technology. The original verdict was later set aside.

Ruda said she sees the firm really investing in and building out the Los Angeles office in terms of headcount and personnel.

"I practiced in Los Angeles for seven years, so I understand the importance of that market," she said.

Ruda said she enjoys working on unusual matters, including being the chief negotiator on behalf of a North Hollywood topless bar in a legal challenge that led to a group of dancers securing the industry's only recognized union in 2023.

"There's nothing we're afraid to take on. We're fearless," she said.

Ruda added that the new firm is not afraid of change, either.

"I do think that this is the last generation of lawyers that will be billing by the hour, and so we need to

think of the practice of law in a very different way," she said. "What I would say is quintessential to the brand is respecting the past, but not being afraid to move into the future in a very strategic, smart, fast and aggressive manner."

--Additional reporting by Lauren Berg and Braden Campbell. Editing by Robert Rudinger.

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