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Meyer Darragh lawyers break away to form JonesPassodelis in Downtown Pittsburgh

Premium content from Pittsburgh Business Times - by Patty Tascarella

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Five lawyers, including two who led **Meyer Darragh Buckler Bebenek & Eck PLLC** for a combined 12 years, have formed a new Downtown law firm.

JonesPassodelis PLLC takes its name from principals **Marie Milie Jones** and **Dean Passodelis**, who both left Meyer Darragh this week to found the new firm. Jones had been Meyer Darragh's managing partner for nine years through December 2007, when the firm switched to an executive committee led by Passodelis for the next three years. Both built their entire careers there, hired after serving clerkships at Meyer Darragh while in law school.

"Dean and I have a similar approach to business and to client service, and we felt it was time to join forces and move forward, focused on clients," Jones said.

Both said they have greater flexibility to work with clients as a five-lawyer office as opposed to one more than five times that size.

JonesPassodelis is a litigation-based practice reflecting Jones' specialties of civil rights and employment law and Passodelis's focus on health care and medical devices, as well as commercial issues for auto dealers and manufacturers. Joining them are senior associates **Jeffrey Cohen**, **Michael Lettrich** and **Jason Rosenberger**.

"We've been able to build a team around us that's fairly specialized in what we do and able to serve our clients in a lot of different ways, and we'll position ourselves as a small, regional firm," Passodelis said.

The new firm signed a five-year lease for 4,000 square feet on the Gulf Tower's 35th floor Downtown. Staff, including the principals, were transitioning during the week of June 20

from Meyer Darragh's offices at 600 Grant St. to JonesPassodelis' new digs. Jones and Passodelis said they worked with Meyer Darragh for a smooth separation without issues and that the parting is cordial.

"Amicable and peaceful is the way to describe it," said **Eric Anderson**, chairman of the executive committee at Meyer Darragh. "It's one of those things that happens all the time at law firms nowadays. People decide to go their own way. We certainly respect their decision and wish them the best of luck."

Meyer Darragh, founded in 1913, is Pittsburgh's 25th-largest law firm. A decade ago, it employed more than 40 lawyers. Subtracting the JonesPassodelis group, Meyer Darragh now has 21, five of whom are based in its Greensburg office.

Asked if Meyer Darragh will seek to replace the five lawyers, Anderson said the firm is "always looking to broaden our base in terms of services we can provide to clients."

Jones and Passodelis are focused on getting their business up and running.

"In time, we'll look to grow in a healthy way in number and by practices," Passodelis said.

Robert Denney, CEO of Horsham-based consulting firm **Robert Denney & Associates**, which counsels law firms around the country, including some in Pittsburgh, though Meyer Darragh is not among them, said "for a group of five to leave a relatively small firm to start their own party is a bit unusual, though not unheard of," given the post-recession business climate.

"But two former leaders at one time is surprising," he said. "They're more likely to go solo or join another firm."

Lori Carpenter, president of Carpenter Legal Search, a Downtown-based recruitment firm, said Passodelis and Jones hail from entrepreneurial backgrounds and have that sort of independent bent.

"They've both been in leadership roles and they're excited to make decisions for themselves," she said. "You really need to have a lot of entrepreneurial spirit to do what they're doing at this time — and they have it. They're good friends, have a background of working together, and would complement each other's skills quite well."

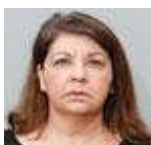
JonesPassodelis PLLC

Based: Downtown

Principals: Marie Milie Jones and Dean Passodelis

Lawyers: Five

Address: Gulf Tower, Suite 3510, 707 Grant St., Pittsburgh, PA 15219



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