

Industry Watch

SAN FRANCISCO DAILY JOURNAL • MONDAY, MARCH 20, 2006 • PAGE 7

Partners' Exit Ends O'Melveny Trust Practice

By Kenneth Davis
Daily Journal Staff Writer

O'Melveny & Myers has decided to eliminate its trust and estates practice now that the two partners in that group, Leah Bishop and Stuart Tobisman, have decamped to Loeb & Loeb.

Bishop and Stuart will move their entire team of five associates, four paralegals and other staff on March 31. They also will take more than 1,000 clients.

"Leah and I began discussing this seriously in January," Tobisman said. "We concluded that it would be very difficult to sustain the practice here at O'Melveny and that the time had come to really look to see if it made sense to relocate the practice to another firm."

The lawyers said it has become increasingly difficult to sustain a private clientele practice at a large international law firm like O'Melveny. O'Melveny has 1,000 lawyers in 11 cities worldwide.

"We are, let's say, seven lawyers out of a firm that's well over a thousand lawyers," he said.

At Loeb & Loeb, a 220-lawyer firm with four U.S. offices, he said their practice would receive a greater focus.

"It was just a unique opportunity that we jumped at," said John Frankenheimer, national co-chair of Loeb & Loeb. "It's a perfect situation when you have a core practice area and an opportunity to get two of the best practitioners in the country to join you."

Bishop said Loeb & Loeb has an "enormous" commitment to private clientele practices.

"It has the best trusts and estates litigation department in the city," she said. "And that's a resource that we'd really like to have."

Bishop specializes in estate planning, estate administration and exempt organizations. She said she represents some of the largest public charities and private foundations in Southern California as well as outside of California.

She assisted one of her clients, which she declined to name, in transferring a family business worth over \$100 million from a parent to a child.

Bishop has been with O'Melveny for 25 years. After she graduated from Columbia University School of Law in 1979, she clerked for New York federal district Judge Edmund L. Palmieri and then joined O'Melveny.



ROBERT LEVINS / Daily Journal

"It's been a wonderful place to practice law," Leah Bishop, left, said of O'Melveny, which she and Stuart Tobisman, right, are leaving for Loeb.

O'Melveny has been "incredibly gracious" about the move, she said.

"It's been a wonderful place to practice law," she said. "But the direction that O'Melveny is going doesn't provide the platform that we need for our clients in the same manner as Loeb."

Tobisman's practice concentrates on estate planning and exempt organizations. He and his colleagues have handled some of the largest estate and trust administrations for "some very affluent" people. He said he's also involved in estate planning for some prominent clients in California as well as some major philanthropic organizations, both public charities and private foundations. He declined to name his clients.

Tobisman joined O'Melveny out of Boalt Hall in 1969. He said the move to Loeb is unusual because O'Melveny had been so "amicable" and "supportive." The firm went to great lengths to try to find arrangements that would enable them to stay, including hiring a consultant.

"But it became clear that those arrangements couldn't be worked out to meet the long-term needs

of our practice," he said.

He said the firm also has been very supportive in helping them plan the transfer of what will be hundreds of client matters.

"We understand their decision and don't disagree," said Joseph Calabrese, head of the firm's Century City office.

"But we're sad to see them go."

Calabrese said the firm continues to focus on complex adversarial and transaction matters. An individual-focus practice probably would be better-suited for a firm like Loeb & Loeb.

He said O'Melveny's peer firms like Gibson, Dunn & Crutcher and Latham & Watkins had eliminated trusts and estates practice groups years ago.

"We've been the last one to have this practice for quite a number of years," he said.

The five associates who are joining Stuart and Bishop in their move to Loeb & Loeb are Laura Berger, Linda Deitch, Alyse Pelavin, Tarin Bross and Debby Korney.

Loeb & Loeb has 220 attorneys firmwide, with offices in New York, Los Angeles, Chicago and Nashville.