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BY MARK GORDON | MANAGING EDITOR

Labor Days

Employment law is changing fast, and in wide directions. An established firm seeks to lead the way.

One of the newest lawyers at Williams Parker in Sarasota, labor and employment attorney John Hament, could have been one of the oldest.

In the 1990s, Hament and his law partner, Daniel Kunkel, were two of the few attorneys in town who focused exclusively on labor and employment law. They had been with another firm, Abel Band, and sought a change. Hament and William Harrison with Williams Parker had multiple conversations about joining forces. But Hament and Kunkel ultimately decided to go entrepreneurial. “We couldn’t break the feeling of wanting to start our own firm,” says Hament.

While that venture was successful, Hament says thoughts of someday joining Williams Parker never completely went away. Those thoughts turned into reality in early March, when Hament, along with three at-

torneys from his former firm and two legal staffers, joined Williams Parker, officially Williams Parker Harrison Dietz & Getzen. Says Hament: “The loop has been closed.”

Hament adds that if he didn’t find a firm like Williams Parker that met his standards and values, he would have closed the firm and probably retired — like Kunkel did a few years ago. “I felt Williams Parker was a terrific match for our clients,” says Hament, son of a Harvard-trained labor attorney.

Hament’s timing this go-around was also just right for Williams Parker, one of the largest firms in the Sarasota-Bradenton region, which celebrated its 90th anniversary last year. Williams Parker President Ric Gregoria says the firm put a priority on expanding its labor and employment section after an office-wide retreat



Lori Sax

Longtime Sarasota area labor and employment attorney **JOHN HAMENT**, left, recently joined Williams Parker in Sarasota, where he will team up with firm President **RIC GREGORIA**, among others.

last year. Labor law, from new overtime regulations to gender discrimination, is one of the fastest-growing legal specialties, says Williams Parker COO Brad Robbins.

“We noticed our clients

had more work for us to do,” Gregoria says. “There’s a huge expansion in the number of rules employers face today from years ago. We needed more depth.”

Williams Parker now has

47 attorneys, from tax and estate planning to land use and health care. In addition to Hament, attorneys Jennifer Fowler-Hermes, Gail Farb and Lindsey Dunn also joined Williams Parker. The new attorneys represent public and private employers of all sizes. The already existing labor and employment practice at Williams Parker also only represents employers.

Another similarity between Hament and his team and Williams Parker is

both aim to provide clients preventive advice and avoid high trial counts. “We try to keep our clients out of trouble, and out of court,” Hament says. “We get a lot of satisfaction out of that.”

The next step, and challenge, for Hament and the burgeoning labor and employment practice at Williams Parker — past casework with clients — is to spread the word among businesses that aren’t clients. One aspect of the strategy there is for Hament to continue with

his second job: the speaking circuit. Hament has spoken about labor law at legal and human resources industry conferences for years, a frequent source of branding and finding clients.

Gregoria, Hament and others at the firm will also take the expanded labor and employment practice directly to the business community, with networking and other events. “We are very excited,” says Gregoria. “We are constantly smiling at each other.”