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New IP firm debuts with familiar names

Niro, McAndrews sons branch off from Niro, Haller & Niro practice

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Like father, like son: It's the law firm theory of innovation.

Raymond P. Niro Jr. and Matthew G. McAndrews — each a son of a name partner at prominent intellectual property law firms in Chicago — launched their own five-attorney firm today: Niro, McAndrews, Dowell & Grossman LLC.

The firm is largely a spin-off from Niro, Haller & Niro Ltd., which Raymond P. Niro co-founded in 1976 and is known nationally for representing plaintiffs in patent litigation.

McAndrews, who has practiced at the Niro firm for the past 13 years, is the son of George P. McAndrews, a founding partner of the 70-plus lawyer IP boutique McAndrews, Held & Malloy Ltd. The younger Niro has practiced at his father's firm for his entire 24-year career.

"I remember being in sixth grade, making photocopies in the backroom when it was just my dad and (Gerald D. Hosier)," Niro said. "So it's a bit of an emotional decision but one I'm very excited about."

McAndrews said the move was "nine parts exhilaration, one part sheer panic," but joked that the new firm had assurances it would not face trademark lawsuits over its name.

McAndrews and Niro, who went to high school together, have long discussed starting a firm, saying they are excited to build their own law firm, much the way their fathers did.

"The whole reason we're making the move is, in our own right, we want to earn our way into that masthead," McAndrews

said. "If there's anybody who understands our move, it's our dads. They're thrilled."

For his part, the elder Niro said he supports the new firm. "We're very proud, to be frank, that our firm that has been hugely successful and Matt's father's firm that has been hugely successful can spin off and create new entities that I think will be very successful," said Niro.

This is not the first spin-off from Niro's firm. Flachsbart & Greenspoon LLC opened eight years ago after William W. Flachsbart and Robert P. Greenspoon left Niro, Haller & Niro.

The other founding partners of the firm opening today are Anthony E. Dowell and Mark M. Grossman. Dowell had been of counsel at Taft, Stettinius & Hollister LLP and previously spent a decade at McAndrews, Held & Malloy. Grossman had been practicing at Grossman Law Offices.

Rounding out the new firm are Ph.D. patent agent Brian P. Lynch and associate Kyle D. Wallenberg.

The firm will be branded as Niro, McAndrews.

McAndrews said each of the founding partners will bring "all of his clients and client matters" to the new firm. The new firm will primarily represent plaintiffs in patent litigation and will also work on the defense side.

The Niro firm gained its reputation representing individual patent holders, small companies and litigants who have been called non-practicing entities or, more derisively, "patent trolls."

The elder Niro said he introduced the contingent fee model to patent litigation with his former partner Hosier, whom he called "probably the most economically successful patent attorney in the history of the world." Growth in that practice has led corporations to fight for legislation that would weaken



Raymond P. Niro Jr.



Matthew G. McAndrews

some patent rights or limit the ability to file patent lawsuits.

In a case that garnered national attention during the ongoing patent legislation debate, McAndrews represented Innovatio IP Ventures, a non-practicing entity that used a number of Wi-Fi-related patents to sue or threaten to sue businesses such as hotels that provided Internet access to costumers.

Cisco Systems Inc. intervened in that case, which concluded last year when U.S. District Judge James F. Holderman ruled that the patents were less valuable than McAndrews had argued.

Still, McAndrews and Niro said their practice will be much broader than representing plaintiffs.

The younger Niro has defended B. Braun Medical Inc., Stanley Black & Decker Inc., Weber-Stephen Products LLC (maker of Weber Grill), Lemko Corp. and others, according to his website bio.

Niro currently defends Kolcraft Enterprises, a Chicago-based manufacturer of baby products, in a patent case brought by an Italian company.

"We want to stand for innovators and inventors on the one hand, and we also want to expunge bad patents from the public domain on the other

hand," McAndrews said. "And we've done that. That may surprise some, but Raymond and I have actually worked on the defense side together."

"I think innovation thrives when good patents are enforced and bad patents are taken out of the equation," the younger Niro said. "So we're going to represent both sides."

McAndrews said the firm also handles inter partes review hearings before the Patent Trial and Appeal Board and intends to expand its practice into post-issuance matters such as post-grant reviews and the transitional program for business method patents.

He said the firm will also handle some commercial disputes and stressed the firm's trial abilities.

"At the end of the day, the four founding members of our new firm have developed reputations as complex trial lawyers," he said.

The firm is working in 3,500 square feet of office space at 200 W. Madison St., where it signed a four-year lease, McAndrews said.

The elder Niro, whose firm now stands at 25 lawyers, compared the split to when The Beatles broke up.

"Everybody said, 'Oh what's going to happen?'" Niro said. "They kept writing hit records. All four of them. That's what happened."