

Ford O'Brien Brings On Former SEC Atty In Austin

By James Boyle

Law360 (June 6, 2023, 3:47 PM EDT) -- White collar boutique firm Ford O'Brien Landy LLP has expanded its office in Texas this week with the addition of an attorney with more than 35 years of litigation experience.

Michael Piazza joined Ford O'Brien on Monday as a partner in the firm's Austin office, moving his practice after more than a year as of counsel with Enenstein Pham & Glass. Piazza told Law360 Pulse in an interview Tuesday he was ready to return to an office setting after working remotely for the last three years, and Ford O'Brien was the right environment for him.

"There were not a lot of strong white collar practices in the Austin area," Piazza said. "A legal recruiter found Ford O'Brien was looking for someone, and when I met with one of the name partners, we hit it off."



Michael "Mike" Piazza

Piazza gravitated strongly to Ford O'Brien's boutique setting, which he said streamlined his process and removed a lot of bureaucratic and administrative tasks that pulled his focus away from serving his clients. The boutique firm can also take on cases that other, larger firms concerned about representation conflicts would not be able to touch, Piazza said.

Piazza was not too familiar with Ford O'Brien when the legal recruiter made the suggestion, but he had some awareness of the firm's talents following its defense of Joseph SanFilippo, the former chief financial officer for Platinum Partners. A jury **acquitted SanFilippo** in July 2019 of securities fraud, while other executives from the former hedge fund were found guilty of participating in a scheme to defraud investors.

"They have a strong white collar and securities practice," Piazza said. "I look forward to offering my expertise on matters in all of their offices and having their support as I work on my clients' matters."

Piazza draws on his more than 35 years of litigation experience to advise clients on securities and white collar investigations. He said he has seen an increase in complex commercial litigation cases as his practice has developed.

"Over the last couple years, my practice has been about 50-50 [U.S.] Department of Justice investigations and civil litigation," he said. "The last 18 months, the [U.S.] Securities and Exchange Commission has been ramping up investigations and intensifying its focus into insider trading and private equity. A lot of those private equity firms are not ready for that kind of examination or investigation, which is an opportunity for us."

Piazza earned his law degree from the University of Minnesota Law School in 1987 and spent more than 15 years practicing in Texas with firms including McKool Smith, Akin Gump Strauss Hauer & Feld LLP and Novakov Davis & Munck PC.

In March 2004, Piazza moved to the Los Angeles area to join the SEC as a regional trial counsel. He went back to private practice in June 2006 with Dorsey & Whitney LLP and also worked at other firms in Los Angeles, including DLA Piper and Greenberg Traurig LLP, before moving back to Texas in November 2021 to join Enenstein Pham.

"Our firm's strategic growth and successes have offered us the unique opportunity to bring in key talent to our regional offices," said Adam C. Ford, co-founder of Ford O'Brien and managing partner of its white collar, regulatory and sanctions practices, in a statement. "Mike's depth of experience with SEC policies, investigation priorities, and enforcement protocols will continue to support Austin's practice and its clients to the very best of our ability."

--Editing by Lakshna Mehta.