

CHICAGO LAWYER

JANUARY 2018



NO PLACE LIKE HOME

Green, Griffith & Borg-Breen looks to a new space, same fish

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As of the last days of November, the new offices for Green, Griffith & Borg-Breen were still a work in progress: The beta for its new website was being tested and carpenters using power drills could be heard everywhere in the nearly 10,000-square-foot office space.

It's no surprise considering the space is being built specifically for Green, Griffith & Borg-Breen. The intellectual property firm moved from NBC Tower, where it had been subleasing office space from another law firm. The partners started looking for permanent space in 2016, eventually settling on Suite 3900 of 676 N. Michigan Ave.

The work needed to build the new space out kept them at the NBC Tower a bit longer than the firm initially intended because the suite's previous tenants took a bit longer to move out, said founding partner Caryn Borg-Breen.

"We felt the old space was very nice and served our needs in a lot of ways,

but there were a lot of unique things about this space and we were really excited to move here," she said.

In their search for a new office, they sought a smaller footprint — usually the opposite of what most growing law firms seek when making a move.

"One of the things for us that was important to us was to have our own floor, mainly because of our office culture," Borg-Breen said. "In some of the spaces we looked we could have taken the whole floor, but we couldn't have populated it and we didn't like the idea of [our attorneys] being so far apart."

COMING TOGETHER

The staff staying in close physical proximity is essential considering the nature of the firm's business, Borg-Breen said.

"We do primarily patent litigation, and it's very collaborative, so we like the

idea of just being able to run down the hall to meet with each other," she said. "With a large floor, you either have a boomerang effect with attorneys in two corners and receptionists in the middle, or you have a whole floor with a lot of empty offices, and that's not what we wanted."

"In our old space, we had to make an effort to see people," she said. "Now, it's our own space and we run into each other all the time and it's exactly what we hoped it would be."

Founding partner Robert Green agreed: "The first time we saw this space, I said 'this is us,' " he said. "We're a team, and how this office is set up, we can walk by and talk with each other about everything, from how good litigation is going to how bad the Bears are. It's part of our everyday practice."

Borg-Breen said the firm is on a growth trajectory and that the partners are set on "making sure we hire the right people and integrate them into the culture."

The potential for outgrowing the space came second to the space itself.

"In a perfect world, if we found this space with 2,000 more square feet, it would be more ideal," she said. "But we liked this space so much that we decided we were willing to deal with that problem later. It might be a little snug in five years, but we have contingencies in place to expand into other areas of the building if necessary. If we need to relocate in five to seven years, we will, but we're enjoying it for now."

The floor layout — one end dedicated to conference rooms and public space and the other to staff offices — serves both a practical and a cultural function that wasn't achievable in the firm's NBC Tower offices.

"It serves our needs because we have a lot of opposing counsel in the office and we don't want them traipsing through the space," she said. "From a cultural standpoint, it was important to have a single floor plate that was all our own. Incidental contact that's hard to achieve by phone. The ability to quickly grab someone, duck into a conference room and hash things out — working through things as a team is a big aspect of how we sell ourselves to clients."

NORTH SIDE PROUD

Green, Griffith & Borg-Breen was founded in February 2015 when Borg-Breen, Green and Christopher Griffith left Leydig, Voyt & Mayer and started their own practice. Within six months, they made additional hires and recreated their litigation practice group.

The firm now has 12 attorneys, including a fourth partner — Emer Simic — who also came from Leydig. The office's new neighborhood is a conscious product of the fact that many of the partners and staff are proud North Side Chicagoans.

"We don't have any part of our practice in state court and all of our cases are outside of Illinois, so we didn't feel the need to be close to the courthouses, as most firms do," Borg-Breen said. "There's a lot of congestion in the Loop and it just wasn't our scene ... We're very much North Siders."

The space, which is just off the Magnificent Mile and surrounded by hotels, retail shops and restaurants, feels on the inside as it does on the outside — warmer and more like "home" than many of the law firms a few blocks south. Most of the office's furnishings are left over from the previous tenant.

It has two unique features that you won't find in many law offices: Outdoor patio seating areas that the staff will be able to take better advantage of in warmer weather and tanks full of coral and tropical fish in the main conference room.

"I won't lie — the fish tanks were pretty high on the list of things we wanted to retain from the lease space," Borg-Breen said. "Feeding time is kind of a big deal around here." CL

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Photos by Rena Naltsas

