

## Small Atlanta Firm's Practice Splits in Two

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A large chunk of the real estate firm McCalla Raymer has broken off to form a new firm, Dickenson Gilroy, led by Jennifer L. Dickenson and Monica K. Gilroy.

The two were joined by 15 other lawyers and 80 support staffers who left McCalla Raymer on Tuesday to form the new firm. It will handle residential and commercial real estate closings and litigation, said Dickenson, who headed the closing practice at McCalla Raymer.

She said McCalla Raymer's practice had diverged as the firm's national foreclosure and bankruptcy practice expanded away from its original real estate closing business. "Over the years the two have pulled apart in practice focus. Now is a good time to make that official. It's a healthy thing for both firms," she said.

John G. "Gee" Aldridge Jr., who co-leads McCalla Raymer with Penni Ann Alper and Daniel D. Phelan, said in an e-mail that the split was amicable and "does not affect our core business whatsoever."

Dickenson Gilroy now runs McCalla Raymer's former retail residential closing offices, Aldridge said, but otherwise, nothing about McCalla Raymer has changed. It "continues to serve its local and national clients in the areas of real estate, foreclosure, bankruptcy, eviction, corporate, residential and commercial litigation and residential REO [real-estate owned] closings."

Aldridge's firm is left with 33 lawyers, of whom eight are partners.

The lawyers joining Dickenson Gilroy include two of McCalla Raymer's founders, Isaac W. "Ike" Cobb and Lyle D. Nichols, who are both of counsel.

Joining as partners are Peter G. Babcock, Deborah S. Bailey, Michael P. Barry and Kenneth E. Raymer. The latter is the son of Richard E. Raymer, who left Hansell Post 25 years ago with a group of attorneys including Cobb and Nichols to form McCalla Raymer.

Joining as associates are Heather A. Dognazzi, Gregory B. Grogan, Brian J. Harris, Suzanne E. Henry, Christopher R. Lane, Makia Metzger, Ashok Pavamani, Tania T. Trumble and Tracie G. Wynn.

Dickenson Gilroy has taken over all of McCalla's retail residential closing offices along with their attorneys and staff, Dickenson said, so the only thing that will change for closing clients is

the name on the door. The new firm has nine offices throughout metro Atlanta and is headquartered in her former McCalla Raymer office in Alpharetta, Ga.

One McCalla Raymer real estate closing office in Paulding County, Ga., spun off as a separate law firm called Almand & Cohen, headed by Bond H. Almand and Holly A. Cohen.

Dickenson, 40, joined McCalla Raymer in 1994, two years after receiving her law degree from Emory Law School, and became a partner in 1999.

"To go to the next level, this is the way to do it," she said, explaining that she saw opportunities to grow and modernize -- for instance, by developing software to make title searches more efficient. She noted that some states have computerized all of their deed filings, but in Georgia, "you still have to do a lot of legwork."

"The real estate practice needed its own opportunity to grow and flourish," said Gilroy, 38, who co-led McCalla Raymer's litigation group and now heads the litigation practice at Dickenson Gilroy.

Gilroy is corporate counsel for Harry Norman Realtors and does a lot of work for Prudential Georgia Realty. Her clients are primarily local real estate agents and brokers, she said, and her practice focuses on disputes arising from closings. She also handles bankruptcy and foreclosure litigation for national lenders and mortgage companies.

"I'm going back to my roots of civil real estate contract litigation," she said, adding that she had worked closely with Dickenson's closing department at McCalla Raymer.

Gilroy joined McCalla Raymer in 1999 as a senior associate, following six years at a general practice firm and then a trusts-and-estates firm. She became a partner three years ago.

She had been recruited by one of McCalla's founders, Carol V. Clark, who at the time headed the firm's litigation department and later left to form her own firm. "She was an integral part of getting me and Jennifer to where we are," Gilroy said.

Dickenson noted that the new firm's Tuesday launch was 25 years to the day from when Clark, Raymer, Cobb, Nichols and other Hansell Post lawyers started McCalla Raymer. She didn't realize the coincidence until she told Richard Raymer the launch date. "He said, 'May 1, 1982, when the leaves were on the trees, that's when we left Hansell Post.' It's very kismet."

The two founders say that Dickenson Gilroy is one of the largest -- if not the largest -- female-led law firm in Georgia. "Hopefully, we'll be an encouragement to other women who want to try to break out on their own and build successful practices doing what they like with people they like," Gilroy said.