

Mid-Law Partner Classes Growing Fast In Southeast States

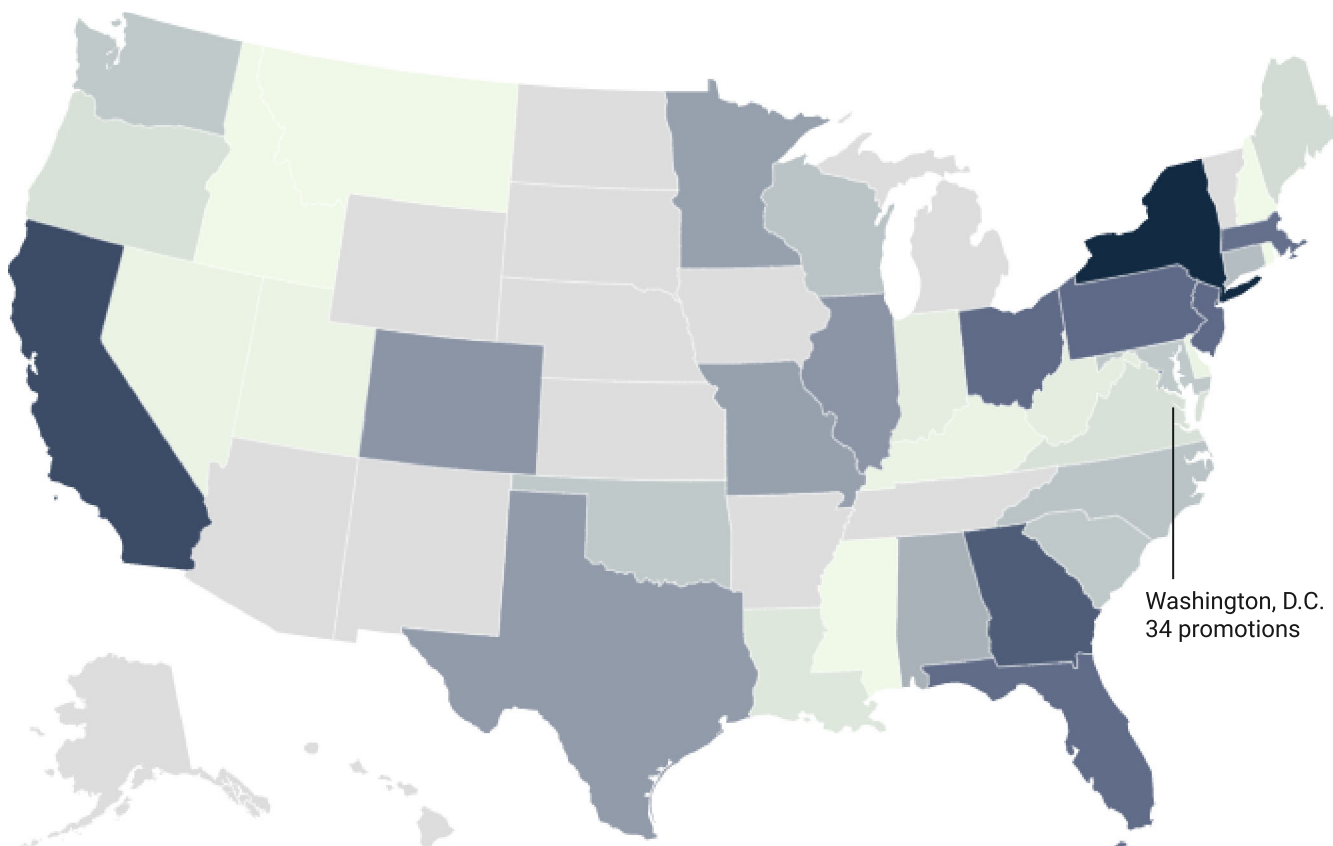
By **Adrian Cruz**

Law360 (March 3, 2023, 3:40 PM EST) -- Over 100 Mid-Law firms started 2023 with the announcement of their annual partner promotion classes, and according to a survey of announcements by Law360 Pulse, Southeastern markets like Georgia and the Carolinas were particularly active, featuring substantial increases from the previous year.

For its calculations, Law360 Pulse looked at partnership announcements made by 109 Mid-Law firms from Dec. 1 through Feb. 14.

Southeast Catching Up to New York and California

Even as New York and California continue to see the highest numbers of mid-law partner promotions, southeastern states such as Georgia and Florida are trending upwards.



Among those firms, the traditional legal hotbeds of New York and California were once again the

most active, with 80 and 52 partner promotions, respectively.

Outside of the usual big legal markets, Atlanta-based firms were extremely active in terms of partner promotions this winter, led by the 11 at Morris Manning & Martin LLP, nine at Arnall Golden Gregory LLP and six at Smith Gambrell & Russell LLP.

"Most firms want to be a stronger version of themselves, and to be stronger, they need to grow in areas of focus," law firm adviser Kent Zimmermann told Law360 Pulse. "If all firms are climbing a ladder, most of them are looking to climb up a rung or a few rungs on the ladder, and as a result, many of the local firms are looking to become regional, and the regional firms are looking to go national."

A LOOK AT MID-LAW PROMOTIONS

Law360 Pulse examined recently announced partner classes covering more than 100 Mid-Law firms, finding class sizes have stayed steady, a lack of progress for women attorneys and heavy activity in some regions. Read more here:

- [Numbers Stay Stagnant For Women In Mid-Law Promotions](#)
- [How 3 Firms Grew Their Partner Ranks](#)

Morris Manning managing partner Simon Malko told Law360 Pulse some of the things driving Atlanta's growth both in terms of partner promotions and in general is the influx of quality talent during the COVID-19 pandemic, along with the decision by major companies to increase their presence or relocate to Georgia's capital over the last few years.

"Atlanta in particular is a great city to live in and practice law, and the legal talent in our market reflects that," Malko said. "We were able to hire great lawyers from larger markets like New York when they relocated during the pandemic as well. In addition, Georgia has attracted many large companies looking to expand or relocate in recent years, which offers firms like ours more opportunities to work with local, institutional clients, but we need great partners to manage the work."

Malko added that Morris Manning's decision to promote as many partners as it did was part of the firm's overall strategy to promote internal growth and give its associates opportunities for advancement at the firm.

"We have been focused on growth for many years, and we have always emphasized organic growth to meet our goals," he said. "We are intentional about offering our associates a path to partnership, and this partner class is reflective of our success in recruiting and retaining top talent."

While Georgia led the pack in the Southeast with 39 total partner promotions, other area markets also saw significant growth. Although the traditional legal hotbed of Florida saw a decline, with only 27 partner promotions announced compared to 42 in 2022, South Carolina saw a big jump from the previous year, with triple the amount of announced partner promotions.

Southeast regional firm Burr & Forman, which made three out of the nine promotions in South Carolina, took a different approach to most in terms of the locations it chose to name new partners for. While most firms surveyed have tended to restrict their promotions in a state to one or two major markets, Burr & Forman skipped on the state's business hub of Charleston, instead promoting a partner in each of the Hilton Head, Greenville and Columbia offices.

Burr & Forman managing partner Ed Christian told Law360 Pulse that although in this case, the geographic spread of the partner promotions was incidental, it reflected the firm's strength across its footprint, even in the smaller locations.

"We do not set out to promote by geography or practice," he said. "Promotion is the result of excellent and responsive service to clients, economic contribution, and good firm citizenship."

Christian also said that because of the increased corporate expansion in the Southeast, more outside firms of all sizes are expanding or growing their presence in its markets, which puts pressure on the regional firms to keep pace and retain their attorneys.

"Our lawyers are regularly contacted by other firms," he said. "We work hard to maintain a culture that makes lawyers want to build their careers here. Our lawyers enjoy their jobs and working with each other, and that helps us with retention and recruiting, which is how we stay competitive even in high-growth markets."

Outside the Southeast, some of the other markets that saw significant activity include Washington, D.C., which saw 34 partner promotions led by intellectual property firm Finnegan Henderson Farabow Garrett & Dunner LLP's eight, and Ohio, with 29 promotions led by Benesch Friedlander Coplan & Aronoff LLC's 15.

In contrast, for the second year in a row, Texas Mid-Law markets didn't see much partner promotion activity with the exception of local firm Winstead PC, which named 14 new partners. Outside of that, the only other recorded activity was by tax firm Chamberlain Hrdlicka, which named two partners in Houston and one in San Antonio.

Overall, the 109 firms surveyed promoted an average of 5.28 attorneys, with Northeastern markets seeing 193, Southeastern markets seeing 113 and Midwestern markets seeing 91.

On the other side of the country, there were 66 recorded promotions on the West Coast, 26 in the Southwest and 24 in the Mountain West.

Zimmermann said one of the biggest trends he's seen in the post-pandemic era is that firms are increasingly choosing to follow the talent, pursuing attorneys they're interested in hiring and establishing operations in certain locations based on the people, even if they're not in areas that were of particular strategic importance in the past.

"Firms are going to the talent more than they used to," he said. "For example, more firms are opening in Miami. While some are going to Miami for client matters in South Florida, many are going there more for the people who have national or international practices that choose to live there."

At the same time, Zimmermann added that another criteria firms have increasingly been focusing on is industry, with many of them selecting which locations to grow in based on the requirements of clients in particular industries. One example he used was life sciences, noting firms that focus on that industry tend to have major practices in areas such as Boston, Northern California and New York.

"Many firms have a strategy driven by industry sectors, which has been a trend in the past decade, especially picking up steam over the last five years," Zimmermann said. "When firms choose industry to be preeminent in serving, often they want to align their geographic growth priorities where outsize amounts of money are being invested in the sectors of focus because there's more work to focus on."

--Editing by Philip Shea.