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Civil appellate firm finds success by focusing on a niche

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Civil appellate law firm Alexander Dubose Jones & Townsend LLP is doubling its downtown space.

In the last year, the Texas firm added three partners to its Austin office, which had four attorneys, and this month opened a Dallas office with two attorneys. With just 13 attorneys firmwide, it is the largest boutique firm in Texas specializing in civil appellate law and one of the largest in the country. The firm's Houston office has four attorneys.

The Austin office will grow its space at the **Bank of America** building from 2,100 square feet to nearly 4,500 square feet. Real estate firm **Commercial Texas** LLC is brokering the expansion.

The law firm is part of a growing segment of boutique firms that focus tightly on a niche and are staffed by highly-seasoned attorneys who come from the upper echelons of large law firms. As elite firms feel pressure to merge or go global, they are shedding less lucrative practices, such as personal and product injury, employment law and routine commercial disputes, according to industry experts. The beneficiaries are often boutique firms with nimbler structures, flexible rates and talent to spare.

Founded in 2003, Alexander Dubose Jones & Townsend began with four lawyers who headed prestigious appellate groups at firms such as **Fulbright & Jaworski LLP** and Scott Douglass & McConnico LLP.

The firm, which represents several Fortune 500 companies, lacks the hierarchy of a typical firm. It has no managing partner and no real associates. The firm's youngest attorney, Susan Vance, is a 6-year lawyer with considerable appellate experience, including experience as a law clerk with the U.S. Court of Appeals.

Ten of the firm's 13 attorneys are board certified in civil appellate law by the Texas Board of Legal Specialization -- more than any other firm in Texas, says founding partner Doug Alexander. Most people who take the exam have practiced at least 10 years and the exam itself is cutthroat. This past year, the pass rate was 13 percent.

"Most appellate groups you see would have a star and a number of others," Alexander says. "It's unusual to have a group with as much experience as we do."

Alexander says the firm is not aggressively expanding, although that may change.

"We're a comfortable size at this point," says Alexander. "We like being south of 15. Once you get north of 15 you are in a different place in terms of administrative and managerial complexity and that is something we are very conscious of, so the decision to go above would have to be made with lots of soul searching."

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