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Smith, LaCien launch own firm

PRS alums focus on class action, med-mal, wrongful death cases

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Plaintiff's attorneys Todd A. Smith and Brian LaCien launched their own firm Friday, debuting as Smith LaCien LLP.

The two were previously with the firm formerly known as Power Rogers & Smith, where Smith was a founding partner in 1993. LaCien joined the firm in 2003.

Smith announced his plans to depart the former firm in late January, when the firm renamed itself as Power Rogers LLP.

The new practice will focus on class action, catastrophic injury, medical malpractice and wrongful death cases.

The firm is online at smithlacion.com.

The firm is headquartered at 70 W. Madison St., two floors up from the partners' old office.

Associate Andrew Mason also joined the firm.

Smith said teaming up with LaCien, with whom he has worked on "dozens" of cases over the years, made sense because of their familiarity with medical negligence, aviation and other areas of the law and because of a shared philosophy.

"We seem to have a lot of the same ideas or approach

on cases that, although challenging, we can see an ability to succeed in them," Smith said. "And that makes for a really good fit. And we think we're operating, humbly, at a pretty high level in that regard."

LaCien pointed to a recent case the two handled against the city of Chicago in which the two helped obtain a \$9.5 million settlement for a bicyclist who suffered a head injury when his tire got caught in an exposed trolley rail crack.

There were no eyewitnesses, and the plaintiff suffered memory loss. The city also repaved the street soon after the crash and cited tort immunity.

"Todd and I worked extensively on that case," LaCien said, adding that they "were able to recover information, just hustle in finding what's out there, and help his family have some stability in their life."

The two also worked together on *Russell v. SNFA*, representing the estate of a man who died in a 2003 helicopter crash. The estate sued the French manufacturer of an aircraft part alleged to have caused the crash.

The company challenged jurisdiction, and the case spent years on appeal until the Illinois Supreme Court in 2013 held the state had jurisdiction over the company.

Federal transportation officials never came to a



Todd A. Smith



Brian LaCien

conclusion about the cause of the crash. Defense lawyers on the other side suggested it was suicide, Smith said.

"So, that's the kind of hole we were sort of digging ourselves out of from the beginning," he said.

The secure an \$8.15 million settlement in the case in 2016. Smith called it an example of how they "try to understand the fine, granular details of a case."

Smith is a graduate of Loyola University Chicago School of Law; LaCien is a DePaul University College of Law graduate. In a statement announcing the creation of the firm, the two touted more than 60 years of combined experience as trial lawyers, \$2 billion in settlements and verdicts and around 100 cases with results of at least \$1 million.

Smith said he will remain as one of the co-lead counsels for the multidistrict litigation involving defective

Takata airbags, as well as co-lead in litigation against the commercial sterilization company Sterigenics.

Both lawyers noted that opening a firm during a pandemic is more challenging than it would have been otherwise.

"Starting a new business has its own process and challenges," LaCien said. "But this makes it slightly more complicated, slightly more time-consuming."

Still, he said, he and Smith are fortunate, and they try to draw inspiration from the people they represent.

"I've seen the challenges people go through and how they have to manage them, and how they obtain compensation to better handle their lives, pay the rent, pay mortgage, put kids through school," LaCien said.

"And seeing people are able to do that and have that resiliency, opening a business in the time of COVID really pales in comparison."