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## Blank Rome Bolsters Insurance Practice With Kasowitz Hires

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*Of the Legal Staff*

A three-lawyer group from Kasowitz Benson Torres has jumped to Blank Rome in Los Angeles, bringing their policyholder-dedicated insurance practice to a new home.

Linda Kornfeld, who was head of Kasowitz Benson's Los Angeles office, is now vice chair of Blank Rome's insurance recovery group. Joining the Philadelphia-based firm with her are partner David Thomas and of counsel Julia Holt.

The move comes on the heels of several partner departures at Kasowitz Benson, which said it is refocusing its insurance practice on the insurer and reinsurer side.

At Blank Rome, Kornfeld has reunited with a number of colleagues from her days at Dickstein Shapiro, where she practiced from 2005 to 2011, including Jim Murray, chair of



(l-r): Julia Holt, Linda Kornfeld and David Thomas.

Blank Rome's insurance recovery practice.

"Jim and I have had informal conversations about how great it would be to get back together for quite some time," Kornfeld said. Beginning in the late spring, those conversations became more serious, she said.

Kornfeld said she was impressed with how Blank Rome branded its insurance recovery practice after bringing on more than 100 lawyers from Dickstein Shapiro in 2016, including Murray and his practice group.

When they joined Blank Rome, Murray said, the goal was to keep the group of 15 to 20 lawyers together, and dedicated to the policyholder side.

"After 20 to 30 years of doing only policyholder [work], we didn't want to take any chances," Murray said. "It's hard to find a full-service firm of 500-600 lawyers that doesn't have some connection to an insurance company."

Blank Rome chairman Alan Hoffman said the practice was a good fit for his firm's corporate clients. So as they considered the acquisition of Dickstein

Courtesy photos

Shapiro's insurance practice, they chose not to "be all things to all people."

That meant committing to having no conflicts, Murray said, then creating a national presence. The firm was very strong in Washington, D.C., where Murray is based, he said, and strengthened its New York presence last year when it hired partner Lisa Campisi from Morgan, Lewis & Bockius. Next step, he said, was growing the practice in California.

"We all have cases in L.A., but it's a unique market and a different market, and we really wanted to shore up our presence on the West Coast," Murray said.

Like Dickstein Shapiro and now Blank Rome, Kasowitz Benson has traditionally stayed on the recovery side of insurance disputes. But more recently the firm has been modifying its coverage practice, Kornfeld said, and plans to offer insurer-side services. That was a consideration in her choice to switch firms, she said.

"A key to that decision was Blank Rome's commitment to

a policyholder-side-only practice, and to being very careful and proactive about the fact that there will never be a conflict," Kornfeld said. "As the law firm world begins to evolve, it's becoming more difficult to find a firm that will make that commitment like Blank Rome has."

A spokeswoman for Kasowitz Benson said in a statement Sept. 29 that the firm has been increasingly representing insurance and reinsurance industry clients.

"We have had tremendous success in representing insurance industry clients, as well as their insureds, and the firm is focused on expanding that practice, which presents an extraordinary growth opportunity for us," the firm said. "As a result, we have continued to move away from the prior focus on an insurance practice devoted primarily to insurance recovery work."

As a part of the shift, Kasowitz Benson said, Jerry Oshinsky and Kirsten Jackson will lead the insurance practice in Los Angeles.

Kornfeld said she could not discuss specific clients who

would be following her, but said she, Thomas and Holt have a number of active matters in litigation or arbitration that they will quickly transition to Blank Rome.

The move leaves three partners at Kasowitz Benson's Los Angeles office, which opened in 2013. The firm has lost at least five other partners to other law firms this year.

*Christine Simmons contributed to this report.*

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