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Phone: +1 212 537 6331 | Fax: +1 212 537 6371 | customerservice@portfoliomedia.com

Bowman Opens SC Office With Nelson Mullins Quartet

By **Liz McKenzie**

Law360, New York (November 24, 2009) -- Bowman and Brooke LLP has signed on four products liability and commercial litigation partners from Nelson Mullins Riley & Scarborough LLP to open a new office in Columbia, S.C., after sharing several automotive industry clients with the partners for years.

The new office, which opens its doors on Dec. 1, will be headed by Joel H. Smith, who will be flanked by former Nelson Mullins partners Pamela Roberts, Richard Willis and Courtney Shytle.

“We are excited and enthusiastic about the opportunity to open an office for a firm with the national reputation of Bowman and Brooke,” Smith said. “We share a number of clients, so this move is very much driven by the opportunity to broaden and deepen the level of client service we have been honored to provide. We have worked with Bowman and Brooke lawyers for many years on a variety of matters, primarily for product manufacturers, and this represents an opportunity to expand Bowman’s geographic footprint and practice base.”

Smith’s practice focuses on automotive and pharmaceutical or medical device product liability defense, as well as commercial and business-related litigation. Prior to joining Bowman and Brooke, Smith worked at Nelson Mullins for 27 years. In 2004, Honda Motor Co. named Smith Trial Lawyer of the Year.

Smith and his colleagues have worked closely with Bowman and Brooke over the years and share a number of clients including Honda, Toyota Motor Corp., Yamaha Corp. and Nissan Motor Co. Ltd.

In one instance, Smith said he was forced to step in for Bowman for their mutual client Toyota two weeks prior to an important trial because David Graves, Bowman's chairman and lead attorney, was tied up in another case.

Smith says this experience was his “first glimpse of the extraordinary quality [of the firm]” and argues that he was able to step in and try a case of “significant magnitude” with two weeks’ notice because of the quality of Bowman and Brooke’s work leading up to the trial.

Smith and Graves have a close relationship, and Graves admits that the new Columbia office was not founded because of its geography, but due to the caliber of Smith and his colleagues.

“[The decision] was driven by the people and in large part by Joel Smith,” Graves noted.

Smith’s team will also bring a wealth of experience in litigation, particularly in business and products liability areas.

Roberts, former chair of the Commission on Women in the Profession for the American Bar Association, works primarily in complex business and securities litigation, class action defense and pharmaceutical and product liability defense.

“We expect the Bowman and Brooke office to have a decisive impact on the legal landscape in Columbia, the state, and throughout the region,” Roberts said. “At the same time, we will miss our long association with our colleagues and friends at Nelson Mullins, and are grateful and proud of our tenure with such a fine institution.”

Willis has served as lead counsel in jury and bench trials throughout the Southeast, appearing in South Carolina, Georgia, North Carolina, Florida and Tennessee. He is currently an adjunct professor of trial advocacy the University of South Carolina School of Law, his J.D. alma mater.

Shytle previously served as a partner in Nelson Mullins’ South Carolina appellate practice and is especially well-versed in automotive-related products liability defense. She currently serves on the board of the South Carolina chapter of the Federal Bar Association and is a certified special prosecutor in the State Attorney General’s Criminal Domestic Violence Pro Bono program.

The Columbia office is Bowman and Brooke’s seventh office. Its other outposts are located in Minneapolis, Phoenix, Detroit, San Jose, Los Angeles and Richmond.