

TEXAS LAWYER

August 19, 2013

An **ALM** Publication

LITIGATION —2013— DEPARTMENTS OF THE YEAR

FINALIST ■ GENERAL-SMALL FIRM

Wright & Close: Small but Mighty

By John Council

Attorney fee disputes are usually tense, messy affairs that are best left to quality outside counsel — especially when the defendant ex-client has enough cash to afford his pick of trial lawyers for representation.

That's the situation Robin Harrison found himself in when he and his firm, Houston's Campbell, Harrison & Dagley, wanted to extract a multi-million dollar fee from Albert Hill III, a wealthy Dallas heir who the firm had previously represented in a trust dispute in a Northern District of Texas federal court.

Instead of scanning Texas' huge law firms for a lawyer, Harrison's went with a guy he knew at a small firm: Tom Wright, of Houston's Wright & Close.

"We think our size of firm is optimal. It's not so big that we're overwhelmed by management issues," says Tom Wright.

"The thing about Tom and his firm as a whole is they really have the intelligence and experience to handle a case like this from start to finish," Harrison says. "There are lot of lawyers who are good discovery lawyers and some are good trial lawyers but not many can do it all. And they certainly did it all for us."

The matter was resolved in arbitration in November 2012 and Harrison and his firm was awarded \$37.5 million, including \$6 million in attorney fees, Harrison and Wright say.

Ten years ago, Harrison and Wright had practiced together in Campbell Harrison & Wright before Wright decided to start his own smaller firm. The reward for Wright came when Harrison asked for his help, Wright says.

"It was one of the proudest days in my life when my former partner came to me and entrusted me with that matter," Wright says.

And that kind of personal service is what Wright envisioned when he started his small

litigation/appellate firm a decade ago.

"We think our size of firm is optimal. It's not so big that we're overwhelmed by management issues," Wright says. "And if a client hires me or Howard Close, that's who they get — they don't get pushed down to younger people unless that's what they want."

While the firm is poised to try cases, they're also hired to defend verdicts as they make their way up the appellate ladder, he says.

A good example is *Wellogix, Inc. v. Accenture, LLP*, a U.S. 5th Circuit Court of Appeals ruling from May 15th in which Wright & Close lawyers persuaded the appellate court to uphold

a \$50 million jury verdict obtained by lawyers from Houston's Laminack, Pirtle, & Martines in a trade secret dispute.

Richard Laminack, a partner in Laminack, Pirtle, & Martines says Wright & Close was their first choice to defend the verdict — a difficult task given the complicated nature of





From left, back row: Henry S. Platts Jr., Natasha N. Taylor, Jessica Z. Barger, Brad W. Snead, Kathleen S. Rose, Andrew C. Nelson, Thomas C. Wright, Tod A. Phillips, Patrick B. McAndrew, R. Russell Hollenbeck, Elizabeth H. Rivers, Andrea G. Tindall. Middle row, from left: Randall C. Owens, Howard L. Close, Mike Choyke, Andrew Love. Front row, from left: Wanda M. Fowler, Marie Jamison

the case. It was a verdict that needed lawyers with litigation experience to defend, he says.

“For somebody like me who is strictly a trial lawyer, having appellate counsel that is a litigator and tries cases and understands that aspect of it is critical. It is absolutely critical,” Laminack says. “And they are willing in my judgment to put their money where their mouth is and take an appellate case on a contingency fee basis. And as a lawyer who works strictly on a contingent fee basis, that impresses me.”

Wright & Close lawyers are also called to clean up messes in trial court — especially

Richard Laminack, a partner in Laminack, Pirtle, & Martines says Wright & Close was their first choice to defend the verdict — a difficult task given the complicated nature of the case.

when clients find themselves with a default judgment entered against them for a variety of reasons. Just this year, Wright Close partner Michael Choyke got four default judgments reversed on behalf of clients. While each of those cases had their own challenges, the most difficult victory came in reversing a default judgment in *Shailendra K. Goel, et al. v. Vijaya Raghav Atluru, et al.* in April, Choyke says. In that commercial dispute, Wright & Close’s client had been issued a default judgment imposed as a discovery sanction by a Harris County district court judge, based on alleged conduct by the client’s former attorney.

“We were concerned about that because it was almost a ‘he said she said.’ But we were able to go in and get that one set aside,” Choyke says.

“He was the right man at the right time. We’re back to square one,” says Choyke’s client, Vijaya Atluru. “He was ready and he took care of the whole thing.” ■

John Council is a senior reporter with *Texas Lawyer*.

Wright & Close

BY THE NUMBERS

	Firm-wide	Texas
Department size (headcount)	18	18
Department as percent of firm (headcount)	50%	50%
Department as percent of firm (revenue)	50%	50%