

Whiteford opens Bethesda office to lure biotech work

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Whiteford, Taylor & Preston has opened an office in Bethesda, looking to capture more legal business in Montgomery and Prince George's counties.

The 162-attorney Baltimore law firm — the city's fourth-largest — has an active practice that includes patents and intellectual property and the representing of homeowners associations. The firm is looking to bring in legal work from the biotechnology firms springing up along the Interstate 270 corridor and the homeowners associations blanketing Montgomery and P.G. counties, said Martin T. Fletcher, the firm's managing partner.

Whiteford, Taylor's move comes as other Baltimore firms hunt for business in Washington, D.C., and its Maryland suburbs. Law firm Miles & Stockbridge opened a downtown Washington, D.C., office. Brown Advisory, a money management firm, has been expanding its office in Chevy Chase.

Baltimore firms are pushing more into the D.C. area because what used to be separate business communities in Baltimore and Washington, D.C., have blended into a single, regional business community, said Richard Clinch, director of economic research at the Jacob France Institute at the University of Baltimore. Banks and companies once based here have been gobbled up by out-of-state businesses. That has Baltimore firms looking for business elsewhere in the region.

"Baltimore has really become a suburb of Washington, whether they like it or not," Clinch said.

Whiteford, Taylor enters a suburban D.C. legal market that is becoming increasingly competitive as smaller firms keep expanding, said Jonathan Groner, an independent law firm marketing and public relations consultant in Washington. The big firms in the area include Shulman, Rogers, Gandal, Pordy & Ecker in Potomac, with 90 lawyers, and Linowes and Blocher in Bethesda, which has 52.

"There's always room for another law firm, if they can



Martin T. Fletcher is managing partner of Whiteford, Taylor & Preston.

distinguish themselves and show what they can bring to the table," Groner said.

Whiteford, Taylor signed a seven-year deal for 7,500 square feet at 7501 Wisconsin Ave., across from the Bethesda Metro stop.

The office — the firm's eighth location — opened in April with four lawyers.

Fletcher, the firm's managing partner, plans to increase that number. He expects to expand the office to 10 attorneys in the next two to three years and eventually to between 20 and 30.

"It's a long-term commitment," he said. "We've been studying this for several years. When we expand, we're there to stay."

Much of Whiteford, Taylor's growth has been in offices outside Baltimore. A Falls Church, Va., office that opened in 2007 with four lawyers now has 19. A Wilmington, Del., office opened with one lawyer in 2007 and now has six attorneys. About half of Whiteford, Taylor's lawyers work out of offices other than Baltimore's.

The firm already has an office in Washington, D.C. Part of the idea for opening an office in Bethesda is to make it more convenient so clients don't have to travel into the city, Fletcher said.