

# Firm Merger Expands Services for Clients

## LAW & THE COURTS

**LANCE ALLAN**  
*The Daily News*

They didn't imagine back in their days at the University of Tennessee that they would one day work together on the other side of the state.

But these college buddies are doing just that, having formed a partnership that began with a friendship more than 30 years ago in Knoxville. Attorneys James Summers and Richard Allen Jr. merged their respective law firms in December, forming Allen, Summers, Simpson, Lillie & Gresham.

"We have remained friends ever since, and we have talked off and on over the years about trying to get together," Summers said. "And the circumstances were such that it just didn't seem right. And then this past year, another opportunity arose and we took a hard look and thought it just might work."

Expanded services. The firm focuses on labor, employment and litigation. Allen, Jim Simpson, Shawn Lillie and Heather Fletcher joined with Summers, Robert Green and Darryl Gresham, along with associates from their former respective firms, Allen, Scruggs, Sosaman, Thompson, Simpson and Lillie PC, and Neely, Green, Fargarson, Brooke & Summers.

The new firm is located in Brinkley Plaza in the space previously occupied by Allen Scruggs.

"We each had our own issues; Rick's firm was oriented toward labor and employment, and they handled some litigation on behalf of their clients," Summers said. "We were primarily litigation, and we did some labor and employment - but very little. I saw opportunities to expand the labor and employment practice. I believe that Rick saw opportunities to increase the litigation and to be able to meet the needs of his clients who had increasing litigation needs."

"We saw an opportunity to pull together some complementary practices that would allow for growth and also would help us better serve our existing client base. We had no conflicts. We believed that the cultures would come together. We met, we talked and here we are."

Merger talks. Discussions about the possible



**PARTNERS:** Attorneys James Summers, left, and Richard Allen Jr. have merged their firms to form Allen, Summers, Simpson, Lillie & Gresham.

combination of efforts came about last spring.

"When you look at the background of both firms and the clientele and clients that we represent, as we put our business model together, we saw it as a great opportunity to have growth in the future, as well as to meet the needs of our clients," Allen said.

### ALLEN, SUMMERS, SIMPSON, LILLIE & GRESHAM

**Founded:** Dec. 1, 2004

**Basics:** The newly merged firm concentrates on labor, employment and litigation needs of business clients. 763-4200, [www.allensummers.com](http://www.allensummers.com)

With the merger, clients of both firms have access to expanded services. As such, the change has been well-received by clients of both firms.

"The response has been, 'Not only are we glad to know that we're going to receive the same service that we've been receiving, but also that you're going to be able to expand those services in other areas,'" Allen said.

Summers agreed.

"We had an excellent litigation base in manufacturing and transportation and construction and other general litigation," he said. "By having this labor and employment component, it gives

us an opportunity to go back to our current clients, and we're able to provide additional services to them. So from our standpoint, it's been a wonderful coming together, a great marriage."

Growth potential. Each firm brought five attorneys to the new partnership. The combined firm has since made two hires, with the potential for more.

"We believe we'll be expanding again," Summers said. "We see marvelous growth potential. Right now, we're trying to get a sense of where we are. People are getting acclimated to each other. We're getting a sense of what we can absorb with our current staff and also what we may need to do in order to take care of anticipated growth that we see."

The move reflects a trend nationwide among law firms to grow through mergers and lateral hires. Allen believes it's a sign of a growing economy.

"The economy has clearly turned around in the last year," he said. "And we're seeing businesses become more active and to some extent litigating more than they litigated around 2000. There is a national trend to have law firms merge, but merging just for the sake of merging is not a smart move. You have to know what you want to accomplish and then sit back and make some strategic decisions concerning whether those objectives are going to be met with the merger."

Focus areas. While adding an attorney here and there is not out of the realm of possibility, the firm is not in a hurry to add practice areas.

"I think that right now, a labor and employment and litigation focus is a fairly broad focus, if you think about it, because there are so many different components of litigation," Summers said. "As to whether or not we would add practice areas in the future, obviously that would depend upon our strategic needs at some point in the future and also the needs of our clients. If we feel that there are opportunities in other areas that we could succeed, possibly through lateral moves, then that might be something we would consider. We want to be able to move where the opportunities take us."