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Norton Rose Fulbright in Dallas: Measuring Retention by the Decade

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In a transfer-portal era for lawyers in Texas, the Dallas office of Norton Rose Fulbright may have more than its share of veteran attorneys who've spent most of their working lives there or have never worked anywhere else.

Richard Krumholz, for instance, is the firm's global head of litigation and disputes. He clerked at the firm while in law school at UT Austin when it was still Fulbright & Jaworski. He joined full time in September 1992, drawn by the firm's strong trial practice and national footprint.

Jeff Cody is the firm's U.S. and global managing partner. He's been in the firm's Dallas office since 1997.

Denise Webb Glass is co-head of the firm's U.S. healthcare practice in Dallas where she's been since 1997.

D'Lesli M. Davis, head of the firm's Life Sciences and Healthcare practice for the U.S., joined in 2004, when the firm was still Fulbright & Jaworski.

Brett Govett celebrated 35 years in the Dallas office on Sept. 1. Now an intellectual property litigator, he started with Fulbright & Jaworski in 1991 immediately after completing a clerkship for Judge Reynaldo G. Garza on the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit.

And then there's Paul Conneely, a Dallas M&A partner, who joined the firm right out of law school *just* 19 years ago.

Of the 137 lawyers spread over four floors of 2200 Ross near the city's Arts District, 48 have been there at least a decade. That's 35 percent. There are eight attorneys in the Dallas office who've been with the firm since before 1996, and another 22 lawyers have practiced there for more than 20 years.



Photo of Richard Krumholz

All joined the firm when it was still Texas-founded Fulbright & Jaworkski and long before it merged with London-based Norton Rose in 2013.

Julie Tran is an exception. She began her current role in December 2024 after nearly 18 years at Vinson & Elkins. As U.S. chief people and development officer at Norton Rose Fulbright, she's a newcomer in Houston who now manages the global human resources efforts of the firm's 3,000 lawyers spread across 50 offices worldwide.

Tran said office stability of this sort has both a cause and an effect, particularly in Dallas.

"The cause is a deep commitment, starting with our most senior partners, to a culture of excellence, respect and



Seated, L to R:
Brett Govett, D'Lesli Davis, Paul Conneely:
Standing: Denise Webb Glass, Jeff Cody
Photo by Patrick Kleineberg/The Texas Lawbook

kindness — one where people genuinely care about clients and each other," Tran said.

"The effect is that people see that from the outside and want to be part of it, which perpetuates the cycle. Our senior partners in Dallas started their careers when the office was still establishing itself. The firm had longstanding institutional client relationships, but the Dallas office itself hadn't yet built deep local roots, so the people developed an entrepreneurial streak that continues today."

Cody, the global managing partner, cites the firm's onboarding program for first-year lawyers, flexible hybrid work model and long-term hiring strategy as some of the ways Norton Rose enjoys a low rate of attrition.

"Our lawyer attrition in the U.S. is less than 12 percent and under five percent among partners. These strong statistics stand out in an industry in which retention is becoming increasingly rare."

Legal recruiter Kate Cassidy, who founded Lotus Legal Search a decade ago, said a firm history of cohort longevity is valuable when recruiting talent. Lawyers generally like to see other attorneys in their same class year at a firm "so they're not on an island." And even better when they've all been there for more than a minute.

"I think an office full of lawyers who have been there 20+ years is generally a great thing for recruiting, as it shows it must have a good office culture and system," Cassidy told *The Lawbook*. "However, lateral partners also like to see other partners similar to them, who have recently joined the firm and hear their success stories of how they grew their practice on the new platform."

That's exactly the point, says Tran. "Law students only have to look up and down the halls of our Dallas office to see dozens of examples of former summer associates who became partners across all of our major practice groups."

"It speaks to the culture we've built in this office," Tran said. "Our Dallas office consistently sees strong offer acceptance rates, driven in large part by senior partners who are genuinely invested in developing younger lawyers. That commitment helps summer associates and lateral candidates alike see a future with the firm."

When 'Culture' Actually Means Culture

"Culture" is a term used often by lawyers; one invoked most frequently, often unconvincingly, when they leave for another firm. It's squishy, formulaic and impervious to explanation — and therefore the go-to explanation for even the most frequent job jumpers. "For the Money" does not generally burst across their lips.

Nevertheless, the term "firm culture" tends to be credible when it comes from partners who measure their tenure in decades instead of months and years.

Jeff Cody graduated from the University of Houston School of Law in 1990. Having been a summer associate at Fulbright & Jaworski in 1988 and 1989, he took a job with the firm after graduation — first in Houston then moving to Dallas in 1997.

In the 36 years since he has represented healthcare, technology and

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financial companies involved in complex litigation disputes across the country. He is chair of the U.S. management committee and co-chair of the global management committee.

"Norton Rose Fulbright has always felt right," Cody told *The Lawbook*. "The firm offers second-to-none trial practice and a culture that values character and service as much as legal skills. I'm proud of the special culture that we've established and continue to develop, both in the U.S. and across the globe. Our people, our clients and our culture are the main reasons I've never entertained other offers."

Cody says he speaks monthly to more than 1,500 colleagues across the firm, providing updates on the strategy and direction of the business.

"Those conversations help keep our teams connected and aligned throughout the firm, but being part of the Dallas office is about the day-to-day — helping make those around us better, professionally and personally. It's that combination of firmwide engagement and local connection, along with the high caliber of the work we do for clients, that keeps me energized. There's nothing like seeing your colleagues thrive."

Conneely, the 19-year short-timer, agrees.

"It may sound cliché, but what keeps me here are the people and the work. Getting to help great clients with sophisticated business transactions alongside colleagues you respect and enjoy working with is what has kept me at our firm," said Conneely, who now leads the firm's corporate, M&A and securities team in Dallas.

"I really enjoy working and collaborating with my colleagues. M&A is a team sport, and we have a great team and a very entrepreneurial culture at Norton Rose Fulbright, particularly in our Dallas office," Conneely said.

Denise Glass, nearing her third decade at NRF, is fine with Conneely's "cliché."

"It sounds so incredibly cheesy to say, but we genuinely like one another and talk to one another. We celebrate birthdays, we share stories about kids and pets, we talk about sports and home projects, we exchange recommendations for restaurants, we laugh at each other ... good naturedly, of course," she said.

Glass, who dropped the completion of her master's thesis in public health to join Fulbright in Houston. She later moved to Dallas and has never worked at another firm.

"I did a joint degree JD/MPH program that the University of Houston Law Center and the UT Health Science Center offered. I graduated with my law school class, took the bar exam in July, and then had to go back to school for a semester to finish my public health coursework," Glass told *The Lawbook*.

"I was supposed to spend one more semester finishing my thesis, but then the opportunity came along at Fulbright & Jaworski in their healthcare group. The nature of their practice aligned perfectly with what I wanted to do, and I convinced myself upon receiving the offer that I could finish my thesis in my free time. After spending about a year and a half sporadically working on it and not making much progress, I decided to throw in the towel."

Not the worst decision, as it turns out.

"I have clients with whom I have worked since I started at the firm — and they were not new clients to the firm at that time. Many of them are like members of my extended family," Glass said. "I've watched their kids grow up and they have watched my 11-year-old daughter grow up. The same is true of our attorneys and business services personnel. When you form long-time relationships with your colleagues and clients, you care more. You want to make sure that you are doing what you can to help them. You want the quality of your work to reflect their importance to you."

As noted above, D'Lesli Davis has *only* been with Norton Rose Fulbright since the early aughts.

She is now the head of the firm's life sciences and healthcare practice and the U.S. head of product liability and consumer disputes.

"I have been with the firm — all in 'Big D'— for (gulp) 22 years," Davis said in an email to *The Lawbook*. "My connection

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to the firm began even earlier, as I spent both summers while a student at the University of Texas Law School as a summer associate with our legacy firm, Fulbright & Jaworski."

Davis began her career at Thompson & Knight in Dallas, gaining trial experience before a sojourn to Nashville as an erstwhile music litigator for King & Ballow before finding a home at Fulbright.

"I worked on many great cases, from the Bridgeport sampling cases to royalty disputes over Garth Brooks' hits. But, as a born and bred Texan, I felt the pull to return to the Lone Star State. I knew there was only one place I'd want to practice back home — my first firm, the one that had such an early impact on me."

"Just as coming to Norton Rose Fulbright was an easy choice, staying has been as well," she said. "The work I can do here is high-quality, high stakes with high risk/high reward. That makes the work really engrossing and makes me feel like what I'm doing here matters. Norton Rose Fulbright is a trial firm — we put our money where our mouth is and try cases. That is becoming increasingly rare. I didn't get into this game to answer written discovery; I want to be in the courtroom talking to jurors. And my best chance for doing that is at Norton Rose Fulbright. Being part of this practice is just incredibly rewarding."

"I probably should have come right out of law school," Davis said.

Richard Krumholz says the early opportunities he received as a hand-on litigator were critical in his decision to remain at NRF for the last 34 years.

"Early in my career, I gained incredible experience trying cases on my own and with some of the best trial lawyers in the country who were legends in the firm. I also handled significant cases much sooner than many of my law school peers. Getting to the courthouse early and being trusted with meaningful responsibilities accelerated my growth as a trial lawyer and made this a place where I knew I could build a long-term career," Krumholz told *The Lawbook*.

Talk with the veterans for any length of time and they will begin to name-check others, many there even longer, who influenced both their decision to sign up with NRF and their decision to stay: Jon Skidmore, now of counsel in Dallas; John Weber, of counsel in San Antonio; Frank Jones, of counsel in Houston; Terry Tottenham, a former president of the State Bar of Texas now retired; Dallas partner-in-charge Mike Swartzendruber and the late Dan Davison, an IP litigator for 32 years before his death in 2019.

Brett Govett, the 35-year Dallas veteran, said the strong social connections he has made in more than three decades in the Dallas office have made it easy to come to the office each day.

"If you look at who is here, the matters we handle, our history and our alumni — you can see the depth and strength of our team," Govett said. "The opportunities we have here to work with some of the best in the industry on the most pivotal matters are second to none. That's why there are many of us who have been here for more than 30 years, and that is unique in today's law firm environment."

Tran said guidance, coaching and counseling have been key to retention. Dallas-based partners are now in leadership roles at the office and firmwide levels after once being summer associates, a succession plan that generates itself.

"For generations, senior partners here haven't just recruited younger lawyers, they've mentored them," Tran said. "Partners nearing retirement taught our current mid-career partners how to practice law, and those partners are now teaching the same skills to associates. Everywhere you look in the Dallas office, you can see generations of mentorship, with partners investing real time in the lawyers who come up behind them. That kind of personal connection creates a genuine culture of inclusiveness."

"Our lawyers and business services professionals celebrate life's milestones together and show up for each other during hard times too. Big Law can be demanding, but the people you choose to work with often have a greater impact on your experience than the work itself."

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