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New era dawning at Higgs Fletcher & Mack

Experiencing its first managing partner change in 20 years, firm looks to expand into new markets

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Following its first leadership change in 20 years, the law firm Higgs Fletcher & Mack is embarking on an era in which it hopes to expand its geographic reach, talent base and pro bono work.

Steven Cologne is succeeding John Morrell as the firm's managing partner – a role Morrell held since 1997.

Morrell left to become president of the Douglas Wilson Cos., a real estate firm. He isn't severing his ties with Higgs Fletcher & Mack, however, assuming the title as chairman emeritus as the firm, and he will be active on numerous ongoing law firm projects.

Cologne, who joined Higgs in 1999, grew up in the desert community of Indio. His father, Gordon, was a state senator, an attorney and a 4th District Court of Appeals justice.

After doing his undergraduate work at the University of Southern California, Cologne went to the University of San Diego Law School, where he met Morrell.

"The partners could not have chosen a better successor," Morrell said in a statement. "He's a proven leader and dedicated attorney who cares about the clients he serves and the people with whom he works."

Cologne initially handled construction defect cases, in

which he represented contractors and subcontractors, and medical malpractice cases, representing doctors and hospitals.

"The heart surgery cases, and the failure to diagnose cases were the most interesting to me," he said.

Cologne enjoyed 15 years as an associate, partner and shareholder with the law firm of McInnis, Fitzgerald, Rees & Sharkey,

His practice grew rapidly to becoming the primary outside litigation counsel for the San Diego Unified School District, a position he still holds.

added given that its cases now extend statewide. The firm is actively recruiting partner-level talent in complementary practice areas to provide legal expertise in the San Diego region and beyond.

"We also could have an office in the North County to support our Orange County clients," he said.

However the law firm grows, Cologne said Higgs must have the best information technology infrastructure, and it must be prepared to pivot as needed to remain relevant.

"Law firms must continue to adapt, especially with all the



Photo courtesy of Higgs Fletcher & Mack

Steven Cologne is taking over as managing partner for Higgs Fletcher & Mack after a 20-year tenure by John Morrell.

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Steven Cologne

"Representing San Diego Unified employees is the best [legal] relationship I've ever had," Cologne said.

Higgs, which occupies approximately 46,000 square feet among three floors of the Columbia Place office tower downtown, features 75 attorneys and a 75-member support staff.

Cologne said he would like to recruit more attorneys at its existing location, and foresees additional offices may also be

changes today," he said. "It requires constant vigilance. You can't rest on your laurels. You can't wait two or three days to return a call (or an email)."

Cologne said Morrell provided him with a great foundation, claiming Morrell not only fueled Higgs' growth, "he also championed many of our initiatives toward diversity and community involvement.

"We'll continue to build upon this solid foundation as we refine our internal operations

in the coming weeks," Cologne added. "This will enhance our already significant presence with current clients while also enabling the firm to expand into new markets."

Cologne said the pro bono work the firm does for the Old Globe Theatre has been extremely satisfying.

"We've done a lot of support for the Globe," he said, adding the firm has helped the theater company with everything from the structure of leases to employment contracts.

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