

CHICAGO LAWYER



SURGE in development

By Melissa Rubalcaba Riske

After four years of growth in Chicago, Smith, Gambrell & Russell moves to 155 North Wacker



Smith, Gambrell & Russell's history dates back to 1893 when it formed in Georgia. But the law firm has quickly planted its roots in the Windy City after entering the Chicago market four years ago.

In March 2022, Smith Gambrell opened its first Chicago office after acquiring Figliulo & Silverman P.C. It expanded in January 2023, when the firm brought Freeborn & Peters into the fold — and moved into its office at 11 S. Wacker Drive.

"We really needed new space," Chicago office managing partner Terrence J. Sheahan said.

In December 2025, Smith Gambrell officially moved to 155 N. Wacker Drive, leaving an outdated location for one basking in sunlight and with an efficient floor plan. The new office cemented a stronger connection among the Chicago attorneys that were acquired by Smith Gambrell, according to Sheahan. It has room to accommodate colleagues from across Smith Gambrell's nine offices worldwide.

"The more you get to know each other, the more you feel like a part of the team," Sheahan said.

Smith Gambrell senior counsel Arthur Jay Schwartz, who is based in Atlanta, said the Chicago office move fit with the firm's overall plan for its offices. The offices have similar designs, color schemes and furnishings. Smith Gambrell works with Atlanta-based architectural firm ASD Sky on all its office designs.

"The differences in the offices are in the front of the house part, the conference center and the reception area have been custom designed for each office," Schwartz said.

MORE USEFUL SPACE

The new office search started shortly after the 2023 acquisition. Smith Gambrell partner and co-head of its real estate department Mike Moynihan said the search wasn't easy. The search committee had challenges finding a premier space in the post-COVID market.

Moynihan said the firm didn't want an office with more floor space. It wanted more efficiency with its floor plan and architecture details, which 155 North Wacker provided. Smith Gambrell inhabits the 30th and 31st floors and 57,000 square feet at 155 North Wacker. But before the 65 attorneys and 48 additional staff moved in, the floors were gutted to make way for technological improvements.

The firm reviewed several locations, including offices in River North and Fulton Market. Attorney and staff feedback, according to Sheahan, was to remain in a central Loop location close to transportation and the courthouses. "155 North Wacker checked all the boxes," he said.

The firm designed a conference center off its 30th floor reception area with multi-sized conference rooms. There is a large multi-purpose conference room with moveable walls to create an expanded space large enough to host events, something Smith Gambrell couldn't do at its former home.



While the overall footprint was reduced, Smith Gambrell created more offices at 155 North Wacker because it switched to uniform offices, where partners and associates have the same amount of space. Schwartz said this change allowed for an equitable use of space throughout the entire office.

"We want to be able to accommodate our future growth," Sheahan added.

Sheahan said another benefit of uniform offices is turning corner office spots into smaller conference rooms. He said huddle rooms are ideal for a short meeting and have a beautiful view of the city.

Smith Gambrell hosts office lunches on Wednesdays in its new café that has a large island with space for food trays. The room features a large dining table under a modern chandelier. It also hosts smaller bistro tables where people can eat and work.

Quickly, the café has become more than a lunchroom. Sheahan noted that following a recent trial, some of Smith Gambrell's litigation team returned to the office for dinner. Moynihan added there were occasional Friday evenings when the associates gathered in the office after a long workweek. Moynihan said it was something that occurred frequently at the former office and is happy to see it return at 155 North Wacker.

"We noticed an immediate uptick in the in-office attendance, which we had hoped would happen," Moynihan said.

A larger in-office presence improves opportunities for collaboration and mentorship, according to Sheahan. These are important elements in developing associates into strong litigators as they find their own voice, he said.

"When you work with different people you see different skill sets ... you learn to practice the best law as you take the best qualities from different people," Sheahan said. "It's very important for us to encourage our young attorneys as they gain experience in trials. They are the future of the firm."



melissa.riske.1@gmail.com

*Photos by Jon Rauschenberger
of Gittings Global*