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# Plaintiffs Powerhouse Beasley Allen Makes a Bet on Atlanta

Meredith Hobbs, Daily Report

February 8, 2017

High-profile plaintiffs firm Beasley Allen has opened an Atlanta office, the first outside of its Alabama base.

Beasley Allen, founded in 1979, works on big cases all over the country, but its 75 lawyers have all been based in Montgomery until now. The firm tapped firm principal Chris Glover, who specializes in automotive product defect cases, to start the Atlanta office.

It has also joined forces with Marietta plaintiffs lawyer Lance Cooper for its foray into Georgia, after working with Cooper on litigation against General Motors over faulty car ignition switches. Cooper uncovered the faulty switches, which led to a massive recall of GM vehicles and national litigation.

"When we decided to come here, our very first stop was Lance's office," Glover said.

Cooper has become a principal at Beasley Allen, which is what the firm calls its partners, while also maintaining his own shop. The two firms will work on products liability cases together, both in Georgia and nationally.

Cooper said he started working with Beasley Allen on the GM ignition switch cases because of its greater resources and national capabilities. The Cooper Firm has just two lawyers, Cooper and Drew Ashby, which Cooper said is "how I want it." While Cooper sticks to single-plaintiff suits, Beasley Allen also takes on class actions and multidistrict litigations.

"Beasley Allen had the national outreach to work with lawyers and consumers around the country on these types of cases," Cooper said.

The national GM litigation arose from Cooper's representation of Ken and Beth Melton. They sued General Motors over a faulty ignition switch that they believed caused their daughter's Chevrolet Cobalt to crash, killing her. The suit sparked 30 million car recalls and hundreds more suits around the country, including by Beasley Allen.

The Meltons settled with GM in 2013 for \$5 million—a confidential figure later disclosed by GM—but Cooper re-opened the case for them the next year, alleging GM had fraudulently concealed that one of its engineers knew about the defect. Cooper partnered with Beasley Allen on the ensuing litigation and said that he handled more than 100 individual suits against GM.

GM ended up paying a \$900 million penalty to resolve criminal charges for concealing the defective switch.

Cooper next joined forces with Beasley Allen on suits against Terex Corp. over alleged defects in a truck boom it manufactures. Cooper's client Jeffrey Gaddy, a tree-trimmer, sued Terex in 2014 after the boom arm supporting the bucket he was standing in allegedly failed, sending the bucket crashing to the ground. The fall severed his spinal cord, leaving him paraplegic.

That suit, *Gaddy v. Terex*, is in discovery in U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Georgia. Meanwhile, Terex recalled some models of its aerial boom for inspection and replacement of any that are defective. Cooper said Beasley Allen has a pending class action for consumers who own booms that Terex has not agreed to fix.

"It's been a good partnership. We've been able to help our clients and do greater public good getting companies to recall their products," Cooper said.

## Looking for Opportunity

Beasley Allen's high-profile cases have included litigation over the Deepwater Horizon oil spill, Vioxx, VW emissions and Takata air bags, Glover said.

"If there is a case of national importance in civil litigation, chances are we're involved in it," Glover said.

So why make the move to Atlanta? "I think you've got to be open to see what's next, what might be an opportunity for your firm to help more people," Glover said.

For mass tort litigation, the firm can generally get the cases it needs from its business relationships with lawyers throughout the country, he said.

But his practice is different. Like Cooper, he handles individual cases, with a focus on automotive product liability.

"My practice is one case and one person at a time. I get my cases from lawyers with offices in Macon and Athens. They call me up and say they know I do auto product liability cases, and ask for help," Glover said.

Glover, 40, joined Beasley Allen nine years ago, after working for Alabama plaintiffs lawyer and auto liability specialist Ben Hogan. Hogan was "one of the first lawyers in the country who really established the law of automotive product liability," Glover said, including the fundamental concept of "crashworthiness," a vehicle's ability to prevent injuries to occupants if there's a collision.

Glover said that at Beasley Allen he's tried cases in most U.S. states and the U.S. Virgin Islands. "It's been an opportunity to be involved in litigation that I used to only read about in papers like yours and national law journals," said Glover, who grew up in Albertville, Alabama.

But most of the cases he works on are in the Southeast, including Georgia, where he obtained a state bar license in 2008. "I mostly work in the SEC football states," he said.

He said the firm picked him to open the Atlanta office because he's been one of its top products liability lawyers, an area the firm wants to expand, and he knows a lot of lawyers in the plaintiffs bar.

Beasley Allen has named him its lawyer of the year for either personal injury or products law four times in his nine years there. He's been president of the Southern Trial Lawyers Association, the chair of the new lawyers division of the American Association for Justice and he founded the younger lawyers division of the Alabama Association for Justice.

Glover has already met with 150 local lawyers to offer his help on cases since the firm decided to open the Atlanta office, he said.

"We pulled a list of the Georgia lawyers that have sent us a case and I went to see them," he said, adding that others were people he already knew through the Southern Trial Lawyers Association or the Georgia Trial Lawyers Association. Glover said he's been impressed at how welcoming they've been, adding that some of them even offered him a place to stay as he gets situated.

"One hundred fifty times I was welcomed and 150 times traffic came up," he added, saying that the Atlantans warned him to choose a home near his office. Beasley Allen's Atlanta office is at 4200 Northside Parkway, and Glover said he's got a contract on a house just 1.4 miles away in Vinings. His wife, a schoolteacher, and children will join him in May after the school year.

Navan Ward Jr., who leads the firm's hip implant litigation, will also be working out of Atlanta. Ward flies all over the country for his mass tort practice and as parliamentarian for the American Association of Justice, so the Atlanta airport will make travel more convenient for him, Glover added.

He said Beasley Allen plans to expand the office. "I don't know how many lawyers that looks like in the future. The plan was never to be me and Lance and Navan though."

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