

## Office Snapshot: Dallas Move Invigorates Litigation Boutique

By Lynn LaRowe

Law360 (February 13, 2023, 4:36 PM EST) -- After two decades in the same location, Dallas litigation boutique Godwin Bowman PC has reenergized its single-office operation by moving to a freshly designed downtown space in the city's Ross Tower.

Godwin Bowman selected the new location — a few blocks from its longtime office in Renaissance Tower — in part because it was stripped "down to the studs" and could be finished to its specifications before the firm moved there last month, according to its president and managing shareholder Shawn McCaskill.

While "a lot of it came down to the math" in terms of timing, rates and availability, he said the firm's move has been a boost to its team.

"I think it's like that shot of adrenaline you feel when you get a new car or move into a new house," McCaskill told Law360 Pulse in a recent interview. "The newness of it has given us excitement in looking forward to this next chapter in our firm's history."



Godwin Bowman's new Dallas office. (Photo | Jeremy Enlow)

### THE LEADER

McCaskill has spent the bulk of his career at Godwin Bowman focused on commercial litigation and appellate work.

He has been its managing shareholder and president 2018 and he heads its appellate section. McCaskill said his appellate practice grew out of his judicial clerkship at the Texas Court of Appeals for the Fifth District in Dallas, following his graduation from St. Mary's University School of Law in 1998.

"I loved that job," McCaskill said. "It didn't pay very much, but it pointed me in the direction of practicing in an appellate setting and focusing on appellate work."

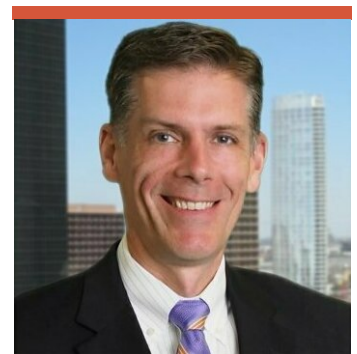
After a year clerking, McCaskill was able to land a job in the appellate section of Cowles & Thompson PC, where he stayed until 2002 before following his mentor to Godwin Bowman, then known as Godwin Gruber PC.

When his mentor departed the firm after a year, she left him "not an orphan, but I was without a supervising attorney," McCaskill said.

"Out of necessity, I sought out multiple partners to work with and learn from, and I became involved in all sorts of litigation," he said. "It probably helped me that I had more than one person willing to support me when I was up for promotion to shareholder."

McCaskill said his practice is a mix of litigation and appellate work, with some appeals being generated from cases within the firm and others coming from outside attorneys seeking expert appellate work.

"I'm starting 2023 with multiple appeals," he said. "It's an interesting change from the last couple of years where I had more litigation, and we were learning to do it in the virtual world with the new reality that COVID presented."



## THE LOCATION

The firm's new office at 500 N. Akard Street occupies 24,000 square feet on the 11th floor of the 45-story Ross Tower, a building that provides easy access to I-35, U.S. Route 75, the Dallas North Tollway and I-30.

Following Godwin Bowman's long search for properties, the building's beautiful grand lobby and drive-up access, coupled with the opportunity to implement the firm's own design and an attractive lease offer, made Ross Tower the top pick, McCaskill said.

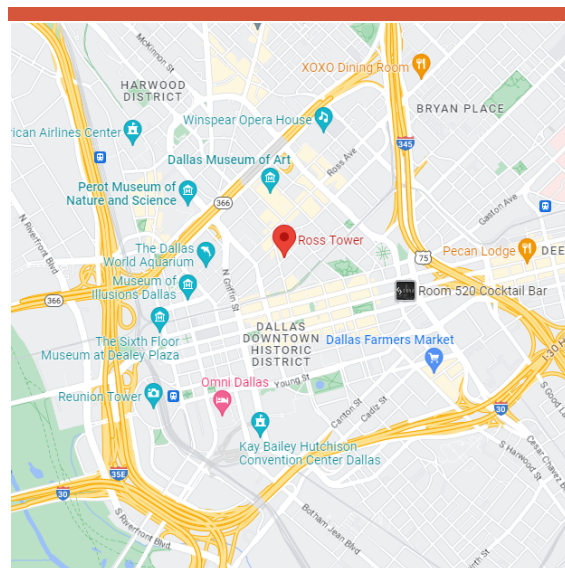
"When you put all that together, this was an easy decision for us," he said. "The timing worked out well as far as our lease being up [at Renaissance Tower] and the many real estate opportunities created by the pandemic."

In selecting a space that was completely unfinished, the firm was able to "update and overhaul" its technology and reduce the need to dedicate space for bulky equipment, McCaskill said, noting that the law library and mock courtroom that consumed space in the firm's previous location are no longer necessary.

McCaskill said he "can see all the way to Dallas Cowboys stadium" and has "a nice view of Klyde Warren Park" from his office. The building also provides views of uptown, downtown, the Dallas Arts District and Victory Plaza.

The firm's attorneys have the freedom to decorate and furnish their offices to "their own taste, their own muse," McCaskill said, adding that the office is just a few blocks from the firm's previous location, so employees are already familiar with the plentiful eating and shopping options within walking distance.

Ross Tower has a popular coffee shop on the street-level floor, outdoor patios, a 5-star restaurant and a tenants lounge, and there is a fitness center across the street.



## THE TEAM

### **38 TOTAL EMPLOYEES**

**9 Shareholders**

**1 Of counsel**

**6 Associates**

**22 Other staff**

## THE WORK

Most of the firm's work involves commercial litigation, McCaskill said, noting that the attorneys at Godwin Bowman handle cases that touch on a variety of industries and issues.

In addition to McCaskill, two lawyers whose backgrounds include judicial clerkships are engaged in appellate work, and four of the firm's attorneys make up a family law subspecialty within its group of litigators, he said.

Shareholder Donald Godwin, who has been with the firm since its founding 43 years ago and has been named a "living legend" by the Dallas Bar Association, is a litigator whose earlier cases include representing Halliburton in connection with the Deepwater Horizon oil spill in 2010, the firm said in a statement.

Among other successes, Godwin Bowman's lawyers also clinched a \$22 million win for Maya Walnut LLC in 2021 in a commercial lease fraud case, the firm said.

"Right now it's a broad range of commercial litigation, some cases are bigger than others, some involve millions of dollars and others don't," McCaskill said. "Our philosophy is that we'll handle any case of any size, especially if it's an existing client or a friend."

McCaskill said young associates at Godwin Bowman quickly get the chance to "get their hands dirty" while working with more seasoned firm lawyers.

"We're a very hands-on firm," he said. "People get opportunities as associates to take depositions and go to the courtroom. I think it's attractive for young lawyers to come to a smaller, boutique litigation firm like ours where they can get experience out of the office right away that you might not get at a big multi-office or national firm for years."

McCaskill credits the firm's open-door policy and family-like culture for his success and longevity there and for attracting new talent.

"You can pop in with a legal question, a file matter or to talk about the Dallas Cowboys," he said. "Any associate can walk into my office, into Don Godwin's office or any of the executive team's."

McCaskill — an elected member of the unpaid Southlake, Texas, city council since 2015 — said he strongly encourages staff to "pursue outside interests" because it "makes you more effective in the office."

"We have a lot of work to do and it needs to get done, but we're also mindful that the happier your employees are, the more well-rounded they are and the better job they'll do," he said.

## COMINGS AND GOINGS

McCaskill said that, like himself, two other shareholders started at Godwin Bowman as "baby lawyers, making their way up through the firm to become owners and managers responsible for the greater good of the firm."

The size of Godwin Bowman's attorney roster is where it should be, McCaskill said, adding that the firm is always hiring if "the right person comes along."

"I think we're in a good spot as far as our firm size," he said. "But if a certain case comes along and we need to add to our staff — attorneys and non-attorneys — we can grow quickly as we did with the Gulf oil spill. But for the last few years we've been at this size, and it works for us."

--Editing by Adam LoBelia