



Jeffrey Claflin, a partner in the firm Plews Shadley Racher and Braun, shown second from the left, took leadership of the South Bend office earlier this month. Besides Claflin, other members of the office are, from left, Krista Cox, paralegal, and attorneys Thao Nguyen, second from the right, and Dan Cory, far right.

Tribune Photo  
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# Law firm offers big advantages with small-firm feel

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**SOUTH BEND**  
Unlike many, Jeffrey Claflin can honestly say he's excited about change.

"I like the idea of change and uprooting at this stage in our lives," Claflin said of himself and his wife, Linda, who is also an attorney. She no longer practices, spending her time instead doing volunteer work.

And after 20 years at the same law firm in Indianapolis, Claflin said he's looking forward to the challenge of growing that same law firm's client base throughout northern Indiana. He started at the office Sept. 2.

"I want to work hard to meld our two offices and the resources of our 33 attorneys. I'm good at that, and I wanted to do that," he said.

Claflin, a partner at

Plews Shadley Racher and Braun law firm — which is based in Indianapolis with an office in South Bend — has been with the firm since it started.

Starting off as a clerk, he passed the bar exam in 1990, becoming an associate at the firm and becoming a partner in 1996.

"Since then, we've continued to grow, and we now have 15 partners," Claflin said.

The firm's South Bend office opened 10 years ago. Two of the firm's partners led the South Bend arm, but they recently moved on to another firm, leaving an opportunity for Claflin to lead the office into the future.

"The firm has a 10-year commitment in South Bend, and we have lots of clients in northern Indiana," including South Bend, Mishawaka, Warsaw, Angola and more, said Claflin.

While Plews Shadley Racher and Braun practices environmental law, that is not the firm's exclusive practice area, Claflin said. Two other major practices for the firm include insurance coverage for environmental cleanup and real estate transactions in which environmental issues are a component.

Most of Claflin's work over the past 10 to 12 years has focused on helping clients determine whether they can pay for environmental cleanup through their insurance coverage.

"I've worked with Fortune 500 companies and small mom-and-pop companies," Claflin said. "We've recovered hundreds of millions of dollars for our clients."

Despite those three areas, Claflin said the firm practices in many other areas as well, including product liability, wrongful death

and more.

"We're big and specialized, but we're not so big and specialized that we won't take on other cases," he said.

Indeed, that idea seems to set well with Claflin's personal ideals.

"The personal aspect of helping people is rewarding for me," Claflin said. And the firm's environmental focus appeals to the outdoorsman in him.

"My family was always outdoors, and conservation of the environment has always been an area of interest to me," he said.

And he entered the law at just the right time — in the 1980s — to become involved in environmental law. That's when environmental laws were being passed and that area of the law was growing.

"There's been a lot of changes since then, but it was a big new area and people needed help be-

cause of the new laws — it was a real growth area," Claflin said, noting that he doesn't work as much with the environmental side as much as insurance cases these days. And, he seemed a natural fit when he started at the firm in the late 1980s.

Before going to Plews Shadley Racher and Braun, Claflin said he worked for the Indiana Department of Environmental Management's administrative law judge. He learned of the opportunity at the firm from Sue Shadley, who was IDEM's chief legal counsel at the time. She and George Plews started the firm, and she asked Claflin to come work for them. He agreed and has never looked back.

Even though the firm's South Bend office has three attorneys — Claflin, Thao Nguyen and Dan Cory — clients are backed

by 30 other attorneys employed by the firm.

The entire firm — including both offices — Claflin said, prides itself on its ability to serve clients the way larger firms can because of its unique practice expertise. The firm's expertise also benefits it because its attorneys will work with other law firms who need their expertise for their clients.

At the same time, the firm also prides itself on providing a more personalized experience for clients.

"We collaborate together on behalf of our clients," Claflin said. "People expect collaboration and to not just work with one person. We bounce ideas back and forth. That's important to us, and it's one of the ways we think we give a better product."

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