

EXTRA

INDUSTRY WATCH

Sheppard Mullin Lands Entertainment Group

By Liz Valsamis

The day after Los Angeles' Sheppard, Mullin, Richter & Hampton hooked four entertainment partners from Akin Gump Strauss Hauer & Feld, it pulled in two more Akin Gump attorneys and caught an even bigger fish — entertainment giant Louis Meisinger, general counsel of the Walt Disney Co.

The acquisitions took place two weeks ago.

Meisinger, 60, will split his time between building an entertainment practice at Sheppard Mullin and handling mediations for ADR Services. A search is under way for Disney's next general counsel, and Meisinger would not comment on his potential successors.

"It's a huge coup for Sheppard Mullin," says legal recruiter Sandy Lechtick of Esquire Inc. "He's a hell of a lawyer, a great litigator, and he's an outstanding relationship builder. He is a rare combination of rainmaker, lawyer and leader."

Along with Meisinger, the firm hired Robert Wynne and Richard Troop, who were both senior advisers at Akin Gump.

All three attorneys are joining Sheppard Mullin as senior advisers. They previously worked together at Hill, Wynne, Troop & Meisinger, a firm they founded in 1975 that evolved into Troop, Steuber, Pasich, Reddick & Tobey.

In 1998, Meisinger left the firm while it was called Hill Wynne to become the general counsel at Disney. Troop Steuber dissolved in January 2001, and half of the firm's 120 attorneys joined Akin Gump.

The four Akin Gump partners moving to Sheppard Mullin are Marty Katz, Thomas Leo, David Sands and Linda Michaelson. All were partners at Hill Wynne and Troop Steuber.

The group has begun work for Sheppard Mullin, but Meisinger plans to remain at Disney until mid-February.

At Sheppard Mullin, the team of new attorneys will form an entertainment media and communications practice group geared toward serving the legal needs of motion picture studios, television and cable networks and channels, broadcast and cable companies and



Photo by Hugh Williams

The Akin Gump partners moving to Sheppard Mullin are, left to right, Thomas Leo, Linda Michaelson, Marty Katz and David Sands. All were partners at Hill Wynne and Troop Steuber.

financial institutions.

"In Los Angeles, we've done studio work off and on," Sheppard Mullin executive committee partner Joe Coyne says. "We didn't have the core-related entertainment expertise, which they bring to us."

In addition, Katz, whose focus is entertainment litigation and complex business litigation, also has expertise in handling construction defect and insurance coverage cases.

"Our decision to make the move was motivated by a desire to work at a top-quality firm with a tremendous reputation where we can put together a pre-eminent entertainment practice on the West Coast, if not nationally," Katz says.

According to David Allen, the managing partner of Akin Gump's Los Angeles office, his

firm turned down the same offer from the attorneys to create a practice group that would be equipped to service an entertainment studio's every legal need.

"While that practice and those individuals are attractive, in light of our strategic business plan and the economics involved, it simply didn't work for us," Allen says. "That's not to say it wouldn't work at another law firm."

Troop says that the group spoke to several law firms, including Akin Gump, but he would not elaborate.

Akin Gump has 117 lawyers in Los Angeles. Of the original 60 Troop Steuber lawyers who joined the firm, 10 remain.

Sheppard Mullin has 175 lawyers in its Los Angeles headquarters and 340 firmwide.