

# Trial Lawyer Penn Gets Out From In Between Harris and Lowry

*Meredith Hobbs, Daily Report*

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(l-r) Darren W. Penn, William L. Ballard, Alexandra “Sachi” Cole, and David N. Dreyer.

*Photo: DAEMONpictures*

Plaintiffs lawyer Darren Penn decided it was time to do his own thing after 11 years as the Penn in personal injury firm Harris Penn Lowry and has opened his own shop, Penn Law.

“It was time for a change for me,” said Penn, a former president of the Georgia Trial Lawyers Association. “I’m unbelievably proud of the work we did at Harris Penn Lowry.”

He and Jeff Harris were in their early 30s when they left Scherffius, Ballard, Still & Ayres in 2006 to do their own thing, forming Harris Penn Lowry with Stephen Lowry, who practices from Savannah.

That firm is now called Harris Lowry Manton following the promotion of new name partner Jed Manton, who also came aboard from Scherffius Ballard.

Penn started Penn Law earlier this year, hiring Alexandra “Sachi” Cole from employment plaintiffs firm Parks Chesin & Walbert. Plaintiffs veteran William “Bill” Ballard, a medical malpractice specialist, joined him as of counsel.

Ballard, a mentor to both Penn and Harris at Scherffius Ballard, has elected to stay as of counsel with Harris Lowry Manton as well, having joined the firm last year.

Penn has also recruited business litigator David Dreyer from corporate firm Chamberlain, Hrdlicka, White, Williams & Aughtry. “David has helped me on the business side,” said Penn, adding that they have five or so complex business litigation cases going, including shareholder derivative and breach-of-contract suits.

Penn said he got to know Dreyer from supporting his run for office last year. Dreyer, an Atlanta Democrat, was sworn in as a state representative in January and joined Penn Law a few months later. “With 10 to 12 years’ experience doing complex litigation, David is a perfect fit for the trial team,” Penn said.

Penn has been working on several child sex abuse cases filed under Georgia’s Hidden Predator Act—which Dreyer and some other legislators hope to toughen up in the next session. He has also filed four suits on behalf of former Boy Scouts alleging that they were molested by Scout leaders years ago, and another on behalf of former students at the Darlington School, a private boarding school in Rome that now has 20 plaintiffs. They allege they were molested by a male teacher when they were boys at the school during the 1970s and 1980s.

Penn took on the Boy Scout case after doing some work with the Wilbanks Child Endangerment and Sexual Exploitation Clinic at the University of Georgia School of Law, which launched after the Hidden Predator Act took effect in 2015.

A judge has dismissed the Boy Scouts of America and churches from a similar suit filed in Gainesville, ruling that the law exempted institutions from liability, which leaves only individual Scout and church leaders as defendants. Motions to dismiss are pending in Penn’s cases, filed in Athens-Clarke County, but a judge has not yet ruled.

Penn and other plaintiffs lawyers are backing an update of the law, House Bill 605, for the next legislative session that would amend it to include institutions. Dreyer is one of the sponsors of the bipartisan bill. “We will be working hard on it in the next session,” Penn said.

Penn and Harris won some big jury verdicts together at Harris Penn Lowry, including a \$16.52 million verdict in 2013 from a DeKalb County jury after a seven-day trial. They represented the estate of Kharka Chhetri against Michelin after a crash from a blown tire killed their client, a Bhutanese refugee who was a passenger in a van transporting him to his job at a chicken plant. Rebecca Franklin of Franklin Law and J. Antonio DelCampo of DelCampo, Weber & Grayson also handled the case.

The two also won a \$17.5 million judgment from a federal jury against the city of Atlanta in 2010 for their client, Corey Airport Services, over a dispute about not being awarded Hartsfield-Jackson International Airport’s advertising contract. The city appealed the verdict, then settled with Corey for \$3.9 million.

Penn said his new firm is also very much a trial law firm. “We have the resources to handle complex cases and we’re not afraid to go to trial on anything,” he said. “Frankly, I don’t think people are trying enough cases.”

He said he had considered specializing but decided to continue handling a mix of plaintiffs cases, which include complex spine and brain injury, medical malpractice, other personal injury cases, whistleblower matters, business disputes and a copyright infringement matter. “It’s a lot of fun to have that kind of diversity in a practice,” said Penn, noting that he doesn’t plan to expand his shop. “I think we’re a really good size right now. I like having a trial team of three or four people plus our support staff. I’d like to stay lean and mean and efficient.”

The new firm is located at 4200 Northside Parkway, where Penn is subletting space from another plaintiffs’ firm, Conley Griggs Partin, which has bought an office building there. He had initially planned to sublet space from his old firm, but then Ranse Partin called to see if he would be interested in taking a floor.

The Atlanta office of Montgomery, Alabama-based plaintiffs powerhouse Beasley, Allen, Crow, Methvin, Portis & Miles, which Chris Glover opened at the beginning of the year, is also subletting space there, Penn added, making it a busy hive of plaintiffs activity.

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