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## Swanson, Martin & Bell to join forces with St. Louis law firm

BY JAMIE LOO

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Swanson, Martin & Bell LLP will grow by four attorneys and two offices in a merger with Kernell Law Firm P.C. of St. Louis.

The new lawyers and firm staff will formally join Swanson, Martin & Bell on Oct. 1.

The firm will assume the Swanson, Martin & Bell name.

Kernell Law Firm, which concentrates on defense work, focuses on asbestos litigation and has practices in product liability, toxic tort litigation and insurance defense.

"We were very excited to have this opportunity to work with his folks and hope we can continue his (firm founder Thomas J. Kernell's) tradition of excellent lawyering," said Swanson, Martin & Bell managing partner Timothy G. Nickels.

Nickels said he and many of the firm's partners were longtime friends of Kernell and his firm.

Nickels said they had spoken with Kernell about merging their firm a few years ago and the discussions took on "more of an urgent direction" in the past several months. Kernell, 53, died on Sept. 14 of cancer.

In addition to the St. Louis office, Swanson, Martin & Bell is also gaining an office in downstate Edwardsville.

Swanson, Martin & Bell now has nearly 120 attorneys in five



**Timothy G. Nickels**

offices, including offices in Chicago, Lisle and Libertyville.

"They have a very full practice right now," Nickels said. "They're great lawyers and they provide us a platform to grow in St. Louis and southern Illinois."

Swanson, Martin & Bell is a full-service litigation firm with 23 practice areas including asbestos litigation, product liability, medical malpractice, commercial liability, employment law, family law, intellectual property and environmental law.

It was founded in 1992 by nine former partners of Wildman, Harrold, Allen & Dixon LLP.

The addition of Kernell's four attorneys builds on the firm's asbestos litigation practice. Three of Kernell attorneys are licensed to practice in Illinois and Missouri.

"We're excited about this new partnership," said Marcie Janna Vantine, an attorney with Kernell Law Firm.

Vantine handles asbestos litigation, trucking defense, general trial work, insurance defense, product liability, toxic tort litigation and environmental law.

Alison Rachelle Helgeson, Megan Julia Bricker and Joseph Ryan Riegerix all focus their practices on asbestos and toxic tort litigation. Riegerix is licensed in Missouri.

Kernell founded his firm about five years ago and is survived by his wife, four children, mother and seven siblings.

Funeral services were held Saturday in Kirkwood, Mo. Memorial donations can be sent to Catholic Charities St. Louis or Pedal the Cause (Team Kernell), which benefits Siteman Cancer Center and St. Louis Children's Hospital.

Vantine said Kernell was a friend and mentor who was smart, kind and soft-spoken. Kernell had practiced asbestos litigation since its early days in Madison County more than 25 years ago, she said.

He served as defense counsel liaison between the plaintiffs and defense bars.

"He said what he was going to do and always tried to do the right, kind, fair thing," Vantine said. "He really was the pillar of the asbestos defense community here in southern Illinois and Missouri."