

# New firm enters the competitive personal injury legal market

BY PATRICK CONNELLY

**A**s longtime legal partners Stephen Barnes and Ross Cellino divide their personal injury firm, changes are ahead in that Western New York legal sector.

The attorneys behind new firm Richmond Vona LLC are undaunted by the competition.

Lawyers John Richmond and Keith Vona recently split off from Lipsitz & Ponterio LLC where they worked on asbestos litigation and other cases. Their new office is on Amherst Street in Buffalo.

They are eager to get off to a fast start, grow their practices and build a firm that can expand its foothold.

“The first couple weeks have been really exciting. Every week there’s a new challenge, but we’re up for it,” said Richmond. “We were really well prepared. We spent a lot of time thinking about how we wanted to approach the practice and, in particular, how we wanted our clients to be treated throughout the process.”

Richmond, a Rochester native, was a hockey goalie at Miami University in Ohio before he found his way to law.

Vona, meanwhile, served in the U.S. Marine Corps and later as a Buffalo police officer before he shifted career paths.



*John Richmond and Keith Vona, partners, Richmond Vona LLC*

The two enjoyed working together on cases at their former firm.

“We started talking about ‘what if’ and what would it be like if we were to do our own thing,” Vona said.

They said their ability to be innovative in personal injury law and in how they run their firm will separate them from the herd of area attorneys in the same field. They said they have the flexibility – as well as technical ability – to work from anywhere and be responsive to current and prospective clients at all hours.

“We’re offering a modern approach to the practice of personal injury law,” Richmond said. “It also

helps give (our clients) the best possible outcomes to their cases. It’s fun to embrace these challenges (of standing out) and it fits our personalities well.”

Richmond and Vona have seen Western New York legal ads through the years.

“I think you’re starting to see that you don’t have to do it the same way as everybody else,” Richmond said. “We want people to recognize us as sort of on the front of the wave of the new, modern (and) sharp personal injury law firms.”

Years ago, Cellino & Barnes were ahead of the curve in marketing and it turned them into a widely

recognized entity.

“They were pioneers in legal marketing long before anyone else was doing that (to the same degree),” Richmond said. “Certainly, it will be a change in (the region). They’re a staple (here) and in other parts of the country and we’ll get to see exactly how (the split) unfolds.”

He said people in search of a personal injury attorney should take a look around the market to see who suits them best.

Vona agreed: “It’s probably one of the most competitive industries out there, but we’re not intimidated by that.”

JOED VIERA