

MIDSIZE HOT LIST



A SPECIAL REPORT

The National Law Journal spotlights 20 law firms from across the country that are succeeding at a time when many of their bigger competitors are struggling amid high headcounts and overhead. These midsize firms, ranging from 51 to 150 lawyers, know they can beat the bigger players on price—but they understand that it takes more than lower fees to bring in and retain business. They’ve got to offer great lawyering—whether in litigation, regulatory work or deals. And they do.



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THOMAS HEYWOOD

Bowles Rice^{LLP}

With 138 lawyers and counting, Bowles Rice may soon grow itself out of the category of midsized law firms.

If and when it does, the firm, based in Charleston, W.Va., will have the revived energy industry in the Appalachian Basin to thank.

“The energy industry is going great guns right

now,” managing partner Thomas Heywood said in an interview. “Some of the most abundant and secure reserves are right here in our region.”

Bowles Rice has eight offices—five in West Virginia and one each in Kentucky, Pennsylvania and Virginia—with active plans to open a ninth office in Ohio.

That geographic spread coincides closely with the southern half of the Marcellus and Utica shale formations, where a boom in natural gas exploration is underway.

That in turn has breathed new life into local manufacturing and other business areas that had suffered for decades. With that growth comes ownership and employment disputes, environmental regulation and litigation. Controversial “fracking” practices have made headlines nationwide.

Bowles Rice has done legal work and lobbying for the energy industry since 1920, so it was well situated to ride the wave of the energy boom.

“Coal, oil, gas and banking—we’ve been based in those industries since the beginning,” said Heywood, a Harvard Law School graduate and former chief of staff to a West Virginia governor.

One recent victory for the firm came in April, when an Ohio court ruled for Bowles Rice clients in a dispute over the validity of century-old oil and gas leases that were invoked to explore for natural gas.

“An entirely new economy is being created,” said Heywood. “And we’re only in the first inning.”

—TONY MAURO

FIRM FACTS:

- Year founded: 1920
- Headquarters: Charleston, W.Va.
- Total attorneys: 138
- Partners: 63
- Associates: 39