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At its new home, Denver firm focuses on hiring lawyers still 'learning the art'

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It's been 25 years since Fred Bartlit and his partners left big law to start their own firm – Denver-based Bartlit Beck Herman Palenchar & Scott LLP.

They didn't like law's traditional billable-hours model. They wanted to measure their success by results, not time put in on a case.

They were so set on developing a different kind of law firm culture, that then, and now, they only hire attorneys within a few years of law school. And they've been deliberate about growth, adding only one or two lawyers a year.

"We are very focused on culture," said Eric Olson, partner at Bartlit Beck's Denver office.

Now, the trial lawyers have moved into a new office at Union Tower West, at 1801 Wewatta St. near Denver Union Station, with floor-to-ceiling windows and same-size offices for everyone – even for the founder Fred Bartlit.

"A lot of firms need to have fancy offices to attract people who are 20 years out of law school," Olson said. "We have a much more collaborative culture. The only way you get hired at Bartlit is as a younger lawyer coming in and learning the art."

The firm took the 12th floor of the new Union Tower West at 1801 Wewatta St., which also includes a hotel. Olson said the new space better represents the firm's collaborative working model – it has big, open center-office spaces for team meetings. When sitting around a table, there is no hierarchy.

The firm, which also has an office in



**Eric Olson of Bartlit
Beck Herman Palenchar
at 1801 Wewatta St.**

Chicago, now has 32 attorneys in Denver who each averaged 16 days at trial in 2016.

Right from the start, Olson said, the firm tossed out everything it knew about big law firms.

"We don't charge by the hour," Olson said. "More importantly, we don't measure people by the hour."

The firm has been called bold and innovative for its flat-fee billing model. Flat fees have caught the attention of some boutique firms, but big law is slower to follow the model.

"We are amazed that we don't have more competition," Olson said. "In our experience, everyone now talks about alternative fee arrangements, but it's very difficult to change the culture of a law firm. You have to be committed to do it one way or the other."

This year, the firm was recognized for its new take on collaboration. Since the beginning, all of its attorneys worked in a collaborative way -- with no origination credit. At the end of 2016, the firm joined forces with two of its competitors to win a \$3.1 billion verdict for its client, Hewlett Packard Enterprise Co., in a breach of contract case against Oracle Corp.

Olson calls it a "virtual law firm" approach – one where the client is picking and choosing its team.

"We focus on giving clients choices and options that reflect their needs," Olson said. "It may well be that all the best lawyers happen to work at a particular firm. In our experience, that is not the case. We want to offer the client the ability to play roles where they can get the best team for them."