

S.F. fraud chief flies DOJ coop for Shearman

By Jeff Chorney

RECORDER STAFF WRITER

The head of the U.S. attorney's securities fraud unit is getting ready to return to his old law firm.

Patrick Robbins, 41, told the Northern District U.S. attorney's office Wednesday that he will be leaving in September. Sources said he is headed to Shearman & Sterling.

"Patrick is obviously a very dedicated and talented prosecutor," U.S. Attorney Kevin Ryan said. "This is not a surprise. People come and go from government service. I think he's ready to move on."

Robbins is in talks with New York-based Shearman, the 1,000-lawyer firm where he began his legal career 14 years ago, said sources familiar with the talks who spoke on the condition of anonymity.

Robbins would not discuss any job moves. John Wilson, managing partner of Shearman's two Bay Area offices, in Menlo Park and San Francisco, said he could not confirm or deny any rumors about Robbins, citing firm policy.

Like others who have left the U.S. attorney's office, Robbins will go to the other side of the table and do securities defense work, sources said.

Shearman has 11 partners in the two Bay Area offices who practice in a variety of areas, including mergers and acquisitions

and intellectual property. Shearman's Bay Area litigators have a "particular emphasis on securities class actions, antitrust litigation and trade secret disputes," according to the firm's Web site.

Ryan said the securities fraud unit has been successful since it was created by U.S. Attorney Robert Mueller III, who left the office in 2001 to head up the FBI. Ryan put Robbins in charge in September 2002, and the achievements continued, Ryan said, citing indictments in cases including McKesson HBOC, Network Associates Inc., Reliant Energy Inc. and Enron Corp.

Lawyers familiar with Robbins' work said they were happy to hear he's returning to private practice.

"He's really smart and a good strategist, and I think it would be great to have him on my side," said Cristina Arguedas of Emeryville's Arguedas, Cassman & Headley.

Arguedas, who has faced Robbins in several securities cases, called him "a formidable opponent."

Although Robbins has significant experience as a supervisor, he's really made his reputation in court.

"He's just an excellent, all-around good lawyer," said David Shapiro, who served as interim U.S. attorney from 2001 to 2002 and is now a partner at Boies, Schiller & Flexner in Oakland. "You have to ... communicate sometimes complex concepts in a

simple way so people can understand it. It's important to be able to express yourself in a way jurors can understand. Patrick is very good at that."

Shapiro arrived in the San Francisco U.S. attorney's office in 1995, the same time as Robbins. When Shapiro was head of the criminal division, Robbins became deputy narcotics chief. In that capacity, Robbins also headed up the local organized crime drug enforcement task force.

U.S. District Judge Charles Breyer, who presided over several of Robbins' trials, called him a "superb lawyer" and said Ryan will have a tough time replacing him.

"He never backed down, but he was enormously respectful," Breyer said. "I think he'll do very well in private practice."

Breyer said that Robbins' departure might lead some people to think there was a problem with the way Ryan is managing the office.

"I don't think it does," Breyer said. "[Robbins] wants to try something different."

Ryan said Robbins supervised seven to 10 people and that the unit is still well-staffed. Ryan will begin looking for a replacement immediately, a process he said could take several months.

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