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Retail attorney returns to Oklahoma

BY KELLEY CHAMBERS
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OKLAHOMA CITY — Christopher Griswold earned his law degree in Oklahoma and eventually headed to Texas to work in real estate law for two national retailers.

Earlier this year, with news that his first child was on the way, and tired of driving back and forth between the Dallas-Fort Worth area and Oklahoma City to see his wife, Griswold decided to settle down in the Sooner State.

It also didn't hurt that Oklahoma City law firm Walls Walker Harris & Wolfe offered Griswold a position to get to know the local real estate market and start making contacts for retail lease negotiations.

Griswold, 33, originally from Plano, Texas, graduated from the University of Oklahoma with his law degree in 1999 and worked for several years in Oklahoma City at Argent Global Services.

A job offer in 2004 with retailer Pier 1 in Fort Worth, Texas, however, took him south of the Red River. Griswold was one of three real estate lawyers with the company handling retail leasing nationwide.

Earlier this year, he started with JCPenney in Plano, Texas, as a real estate attorney.

Nevertheless, during the stint of both jobs, Griswold's wife, Heather, remained in Oklahoma City in her job at the American Lung Association.

"It was a test of our marriage but we did it," he said.

Griswold would drive north to see his wife on weekends, but earlier this year got the news that he was going to be a father.

In July, Griswold started at the Oklahoma City firm and has been working to establish himself as the man to call for the legal end of retail leasing.

And where a retail lease can be hundreds of pages, details are key for both tenants and landlords.

"Those are documents that sometimes take a year or two and a hundred drafts," he said. "You have three or four documents going on with a lease and it's not as simple as you think."

Several local real estate brokers said Griswold can provide a specialized service that hasn't really been seen in the Oklahoma City market.

"His experience with legal council and retail leases having worked for national retailers is significant," said Mark Inman, with CB Richard Ellis Oklahoma. "Somebody working on leases with that perspective will be helpful."

Mark Ruffin, with Precor Ruffin, said Griswold can



PHOTO BY JENNIFER PITTS

Chris Griswold is a real estate leasing lawyer.

provide an untapped expertise in the market.

"He clearly understands what issues are important from the tenant side, which ought to help him facilitate lease negotiations from the landlord side," Ruffin said.

Now as Griswold continues to settle into his new position, and get used to life as a new father, he is hoping to work with brokers,

bankers and developers to hash out the details of retail leases from the letter of intent to a completed deal.

And on returning to Oklahoma and taking the new job, Griswold said he is quite happy with his decision and anxious to continue establishing his name and using his expertise in retail leasing to build a client base in this market.