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# Midwest Litigation makes fifth acquisition in 5 years

St. Louis Business Journal - by [Patrick L. Thimangu](#)

When **Midwest Litigation Services** acquired Glen Carbon-based **Jo Elaine Foster & Associates** in November, it marked the court reporting firm's fifth acquisition in five years.

The company, formerly known as **Taylor & Associates**, also within the past year changed its name and relocated to a new headquarters facility at 711 N. 11th St. downtown.

Debbie Weaver, co-owner of Midwest Litigation, said part of the reason the company changed its name last year was to consolidate the identity of all the acquired companies. Other firms acquired by Midwest Litigation include Court Reporting Advantage based in Springfield, Mo., in 2003 and Associated Court Reporters based in Jefferson City, Mo., in 1999.

Midwest Litigation's new office, among other amenities, has 14 conference rooms equipped to enable the firm to offer videoconferencing services and real-time legal reporting.

Weaver, 46, had no idea how big Taylor & Associates, would grow when she agreed to acquire the small St. Louis-based court reporting firm for \$15,000 in 1985 from her former boss Anne Taylor.

Since Weaver bought Taylor & Associates, now Midwest Litigation Services, the company has grown to become one of the largest court-reporting services in Missouri, based on number of employees. Last year the company, whose clients include large law firms and state and federal governments, generated more than \$6 million in revenue, up from about \$100,000 in 1985, Weaver said.

Midwest Litigation employs 25 full-time employees and has contracted with 68 court reporters at its Missouri offices in St. Louis, Jefferson City, Springfield and Kansas City.

Weaver credits the growth to her decision to partner with Kelly Willis in 1996, a string of acquisitions the firm has made since 1998, and diversification of Midwest Litigation's business. Weaver said the company financed its acquisitions from its own resources.

Weaver said teaming up with Willis enabled Midwest Litigation to attract additional clients and also allowed both entrepreneurs to begin seriously thinking about growing the company. They made their first acquisition in 1998, buying Schroeder Reporting, a local reporting firm owned by Dick Schroeder.

Weaver didn't disclose how much they paid for Schroeder Reporting, but she said Midwest Litigation paid for part of the acquisition with a loan guaranteed by the Small Business Administration.

Midwest Litigation took the SBA loan primarily to buy a 3,000-square-foot building and found it could use part of the loan to pay off Schroeder.

That building on Lami Street served as collateral for the SBA loan, Weaver said, and as Midwest Litigation's head office until last March when the company acquired its new headquarters building at 711 N. 11th St. downtown for \$520,000.

Midwest Litigation's biggest move after Weaver and Willis become partners was in 2001, when the company acquired Venezia Reporting & Video Services from owner John Venezia and became the largest court-reporting company in Missouri.

Initially Midwest Litigation focused on court reporting services in the St. Louis area, which involved making transcripts of legal proceedings for a wide range of clients, including attorneys. Over the years, Weaver and Willis decided to expand the company's services, adding such things as videotaping services and developing digital legal presentations used in court proceedings.

It wasn't easy to get into the digital business, Weaver said, because many attorneys back in the late 1980s and early 1990s were still using flip charts and other old methods of presenting graphic information in the courtroom. Despite an initial resistance, the entrepreneurs eventually won clients over by delivering high-quality services through Court Room Technology Consultants, a subsidiary they formed in 1995.

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