

HIGHLINE ADDS 2 NEW ADVISOR TUCK-INS

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In its bid to become a national RIA power by the end of the decade, Highline Wealth Management is focusing on regional growth.

The \$1.3 billion Rockville, Md. advisory firm has added two prominent "tuck-in" advisors to its New York and Rockville offices, bolstering Highline's assets under management by what a Highline executive said was more than \$50 million.

Veteran wealth manager Aviva Pinto was previously a senior VP for client service at Hillview Capital Advisors. Michael Moriarty, formerly with Morgan Stanley, will now be based in Highline's Rockville headquarters.

In addition to more tuck-ins, Highline chief executive Neal Simon says he is looking for deals this year with two to three advisory firms in the northeast corridor from Boston to suburban Virginia. "For a firm like ours, regional growth makes a lot of sense," Simon says. "For a consolidator, it doesn't really matter."

The regional emphasis is in line with goals expressed by other growth-minded RIA executives. **Dan Seivert**, chief executive of **Echelon Partners** -- host of last fall's Deals & Deal Makers Summit in Santa Monica, Calif. -- praised the latest move by Highline, describing the firm as "another great entrepreneurial story in the RIA community."

In addition to Highline's success in developing "processes that yield consistent organic growth," Seivert adds, "the real meaningful enterprise value creation comes from bringing on new advisors through recruiting, mergers, or acquisitions."

DEALMAKER HIRED

Highline's decision to hire Aisling Carroll as a full-time director of corporate development last year was critical, says New York investment banker Steven Levitt, managing director of Park Sutton Advisors.

"I give them credit for having a dedicated corporate development person and recognizing that doing even small deals add up and make sense," Levitt says. "I think that you have to have a consistent, dedicated effort to make these deals happen, because there are a lot of potential acquirers interested even in small deals and the odds of any single deal occurring are low.

"Many would-be buyers approach us and expect deals to fall into their lap," he adds -- calling that scenario "highly unlikely."

Highline is striving to reach \$10 billion in assets by 2020, says Simon, who adds that the firm has "a decent chance" of doubling in size by the end of this year.

"Bigger really can be better," he explains. "We're able to provide more service and resources to our clients, and it opens up more career paths for our team. It's also good for our partners, who can see where we're going, and it's added about 8% to 10% to our profit margins."

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