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Founding Partner Mathew Tully discusses his return to the firm with the Buffalo Law Journal

Country served, Tully back to work

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By Michael Petro

Mathew Tully says he's proud to be one of the few New York lawyers who can claim he won a case before the state Court of Appeals and state Supreme Court and then went on to serve his country in the military. On May 5, he returned to Tully Rinckey PLLC, an Albany-based firm with a Buffalo office, after being medically retired from the military due to injuries he suffered in Afghanistan. He took a leave from the law firm in 2012 to serve as a lieutenant colonel with the Army National Guard. In a military career that spanned nearly two decades, he served as an artillery officer and was one of the Army's first space operations officers. Now, after two years away from the legal scene, he said he's happy to be back. He recently completed an employee training program — mandatory for attorneys who don't practice for more than a year — and is once again seeing clients. "It's great to be back," said Tully, who was awarded the Combat Action Badge in May 2012, a Purple Heart four months later and the Bronze Star in February 2013. "The military is a very important part of my adult life — since I was 18 I've been wearing a uniform, so to have that chapter closed will allow me to redouble my efforts on being a great lawyer." The firm is working on a pro bono brief for a case set to be heard in Supreme Court in October and Tully is lead counsel. He's also in the process of taking on a criminal defense before the New York State Court of Appeals. "I want to get back and get into those juicy cases. I want to get back in front of the Supreme Court," said Tully, who's won several landmark cases

that helped influence laws protecting veterans. "Basically, I'm getting back in the saddle and going right back in with the big boys. It's a little daunting but I think this is the only way of doing this." He anticipates continued growth at the law firm, which has 60 attorneys in six offices. He envisions Buffalo as the "bedrock" of its New York state practice, he said. After opening a Buffalo office last year with two attorneys, Tully Rinckey now employs four attorneys and is looking to hire two more and gain a bigger office. The firm is slated for a move from its current location on Niagara Street this summer. "The growth in Buffalo is going to be the anchor for us," said Tully, who also opened a Rochester office in 2013 and expects to open in New York City in next year. "The intention is to have quality attorneys that know New York state law and have Buffalo assist our New York City attorneys at a cut-rate price," Tully and Managing Partner Greg Rinckey, also a military veteran, have come a long way since they teamed up in 2004. Tully started as a solo practitioner shortly after the 9/11 terrorist attacks and his first clients were buddies he knew through the military, who like him, had experienced employment discrimination from civilian employers. Networking in a close-knit military community, as well as through his prior position as a federal corrections officer, helped in building the practice. These days he concentrates on representing military personnel and federal employees. "Being a pioneer in many aspects of the military has elevated my profile, which helps my civilian business," said Tully. "The military experience has brought more eyes on me and helped business development." According to Tully, the firm has grown into the largest military practice in the country and is among the largest federal employment practices. "It's great to be the largest in a practice area but the future of the firm, as we see it, is growing a statewide brand," he said. "What we're looking for is more of a blue-and-gold cross-brand and being leaders in our respective practice fields." The military is all about teamwork, he said, and he brought a similar concept to his law firm. An office is scheduled to open in San Diego later this year, giving the firm a presence in four states. Tully Rinckey also has offices in Washington, D.C.; Arlington, Va.; and Syracuse. Next up: An office in Maryland by the end of 2015.