

# Heller Ehrman White & McAuliffe

By Kevin Quinn

Heller, Ehrman, White & McAuliffe, based in San Francisco and annually ranked as one of the top 100 firms by *American Lawyer's* survey, is historically known for its prominent life sciences and litigation practices. Perhaps more noteworthy, however, is the firm's recent commitment to growth. Since 1997, the firm has more than doubled in size, going from 355 attorneys to its current roster boasting 720. Perhaps even more impressive is that a substantial number of those attorneys were added during the current economic recession, when most firms are shedding attorneys left and right.

Heller Ehrman's recent merger with the Silicon Valley-based Venture Law Group (VLG) certainly helped their expansion drive, as 60 attorneys from a well-respected regional firm swelled their ranks. [Heller Ehrman](#) won a hotly contested battle for the right to merge with VLG, which was also considering San Francisco powerhouse firms Morrison Foerster and Orrick, Herrington & Sutcliffe, which was long considered to be the favorite. With the addition of a firm that was considered one of the most prestigious boutiques in the country to its ranks, this expansion will most likely serve Heller, Ehrman well, which was one of the reasons that three of San Francisco's largest firms all showed interest.

Heller Ehrman recently announced the results of the merger - a new practice group that will be called the Venture Law Group and house the attorneys resulting from the merger. The new practice group will focus on venture capital and start-up business law, among other things, much like VLG did as a separate firm.

Another recent growth area for the firm has been in its Asian practice. Legal Week recently reported that Heller Ehrman will be adding an office in Beijing to allow the new Venture Law Group to capitalize on the lucrative Chinese venture capital market. (10/30/03) The Beijing office will be the firm's 13th overall and its third in Asia. This news follows the recent major upgrade of the Hong Kong office with the addition of 19 attorneys, giving the firm approximately 30 attorneys to practice in its three Asian offices.

While Heller Ehrman's recent growth is a relatively new thing, the firm itself has been around since 1890 and is generally considered one of the best firms in the country to work for. The firm currently boasts a rank of 12th in *American Lawyer's* recent publication of their A-list poll, which lists the top 20 firms in the country based on the success of the firm's practice, the diversity of the workforce, the pro bono program, and the treatment and development of associates. Heller Ehrman made the top 20 in each of the last three years that the magazine kept track of this information. Among the reasons for Heller Ehrman's success is the pro bono program, which has been lauded as recently as 2000 as the best in the country and is something that the firm values, having committed 4.4% of their total hours billed to the program last year.