

Raising the Bar

By Anthony Limon

With big businesses gobbling up competitors and financial disclosure woes dominating the headlines, it is no surprise the market for legal professionals continues to expand ? albeit at a modest pace.

The National Association for Law Placement reports that law firms expect to hire more associates for 2005 summer programs and are making more full-time employment offers to former summer program participants than in previous years. That trend is extending to seasoned professionals as well, as law firms look to add personnel in tune with the thawing economic outlook.

"The economy is recovering from a recession and lateral hiring follows economic trends," says Carey Bertolet, managing director of BCG Search in New York, a **legal recruiting** firm. "There have been more mergers and acquisitions as of late and that is reflecting internally on law firm needs. [For example, corporate disclosure law] Sarbanes-Oxley - there's been a lot of work in that area and we see a lot of work stemming from that. The market is vibrant and increasingly doing well."

If the flurry of mergers and acquisitions equates to opportunities, the job outlook for legal professionals should continue to show signs of life. Thomson Financial reports the value of announced M&A deals in the Americas this quarter reached \$281 billion, the highest first-quarter volume since 2000. Forecasters predict the feverpitched pace will continue through 2005, as cash-laden companies looking to The short-term opportunities being created should hold considerable promise for diverse candidates, especially Hispanics who have more than doubled their employment as legal professionals since 1975, according to the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission.

"Every firm will tell you they are interested in increasing their diversity hiring. We have a lot of firms coming to us and asking what they can do to improve [diversity recruitment]," says Ms. Bertolet. "Honestly, part of where that comes from is the firm's clients. These firms are saying we want our employees to reflect our clients. So there is pressure both internally and externally on law firms to hire diverse candidates."

Regarding Hispanics, the external pressure is considerable. According to the latest research from HispanTelligence, "The U.S. Hispanic Economy in Transition: Facts, Figures, and Trends," Hispanics now account for 13.7 percent of the total U.S. population, with the number of Hispanic-owned firms soaring to 2 million in 2004 and accounting for \$273.8 billion in business receipts.

"Even constrained within the United States, the demographics are changing rapidly and it makes sense to employ individuals attuned to that diversity," says Nelson A. Castillo, president-elect of the National Hispanic Bar Association. "Companies and law firms are starting to understand that they conduct business throughout the nation and throughout the world. They understand diverse candidates provide a different type of thinking, different types of solutions, and a different vantage point. They add much more value to global businesses with clients around the world."

Professional resources available to Hispanics include the National Hispanic Bar Association and its affiliate, the Hispanic National Bar Foundation. The foundation has awarded tens of thousands of dollars in scholarships to Hispanic law students throughout the United States and Puerto Rico, and is coordinating a law camp in Washington, D.C. for Hispanics interested in pursuing law degrees.

Still, advantages and resources aside, prospective legal recruits are forewarned not to underestimate the rigors inherent to the legal profession.

"I would highly encourage [Hispanics] to pursue a career in law. We need individuals committed to the practice," says Mr. Castillo. "There are things you can do to better prepare yourself, finding mentors and working hard is part of it. If you have a sincere desire and not a glamorized notion of what it is to be a lawyer, then you will succeed."

INSIDER PROFILE: Salomon Chiquiar-Rabinovich, Associate, [Seyfarth Shaw LLP](#)

With a legal background in international trade, government lobbying, tourism, intellectual property, and real estate, it is little wonder that Salomon Chiquiar-Rabinovich prides himself on diversity.

A native of Mexico, Mr. Chiquiar-Rabinovich is an associate in the Boston law office of Seyfarth Shaw, where he practices all aspects of immigration and nationality law including the processing of visas and consular applications. Dealing mostly with large corporations bringing or retaining foreign nationals in the United States, Mr. Chiquiar-Rabinovich's days are "very heavy on legal work and helping affiliates," but he maintains the benefits of the job are well worth the challenges.

"It is stressful, but my reward comes from being involved with so many international issues that allow me to have a large role in New England's Latin American business community," he says. "A larger firm allows you the ability to not be so tied to the work, and the opportunity to leverage the prestige of the firm to your advantage in international causes."

Founded in 1945, Chicago-based Seyfarth Shaw actively recruits diverse employees through various initiatives, including: participation in minority job fairs such as the Hispanic National Bar Association's Latino Job Fair and the Cook County Bar Association Minority Law Student Job Fair; membership in the Chicago Committee on Minorities in Large Law Firms; and sponsorship of various conferences, activities, and fundraising efforts for minority law student organizations.

Source: HISPANIC BUSINESS Magazine