

# Recovery ready lawyers make moves

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STAFF WRITER

The legal industry is faring reasonably well in the downturn, especially in the Tampa Bay area, where law firms have been spared the layoffs and closings of their counterparts in New York and Washington.

There always will be a demand for legal services just as there always will be the need for shaving cream and razors, said Teddy Pierre, CEO and president of the Pascal Company LLC, a Tampa-based consulting, training and human resource firm.

"In our society you have certain professions you need to have regardless of if we are making a lot of money or not," Pierre said. "If businesses are booming, attorneys are needed. If businesses are souring, attorneys are needed."

## ADDING AND TAKING AWAY

The practice areas of commercial litigation, creditor's rights and bankruptcy law are growing, unlike the areas of real estate and corporate law, which are less in demand, lawyers say.

It's been a busy year at Tampa-based Carlton Fields, in part due to the downturn, said Gary Sasso, president and CEO.

Carlton Fields, which has about 275 employees in the Bay area, is adding to its core practice areas of corporate work, real estate and construction, litigation and regulated industries, said Sasso.

"Of course we are not an island in this economy," he said. "Some of our clients have been adversely affected. That causes changes in both directions."

As one of the largest bankruptcy practices in the area, Trenam Kemker has seen a steady stream of work, said Roberta Colton, a shareholder on the management committee.

The firm, which has roughly 213 employees between offices in Tampa and St. Petersburg, is being careful with its growth, Colton said. "We have always been very



MARGARET CASHILL

Teddy Pierre specializes in training and diversity recruiting as CEO of the Pascal Company LLC.



Colton

conservative, and we have kept our expenses as low as possible. We are continuing to do that."

Joe Mueller, a partner with St. Petersburg-based firm Abbey Adams, said business has picked up with the recent layoffs.

"When people are being laid off and they question their layoffs, that leads to an increase in lawsuits," said Mueller.

The more lawsuits filed, the more people need a lawyer to represent them. And with the increase in business, the firm is adding to its staff of 61.

"We are getting swamped with resumes," said Mueller.

## ALL IN THE ATTITUDE

"Everybody's feeling the impact. It's just a question of how you prepared for it and are dealing with it now," said Bill Schifino Jr., managing director of Williams Schifino,



Schifino

a Tampa firm with about 55 employees.

Schifino said law firms keep track of their cost per lawyer, the statistic that measures what it costs to operate a law firm per attorney.

"You want to keep that number as low as possible," he said.

Lawyers at Williams Schifino have been crossing over into new areas. Transactional lawyers are learning about litigation work, for example.

"We believe this economy will come back, and we want to be ready for it," said Schifino. "The last thing we want to do is lose personnel."

Sarasota-based Abel Band Chartered intends to keep its staff of 86 intact by relocating certain staff members to practices that may be busier than those for which they were originally hired, said Todd Rains, administrator. "We are making every effort to retain our best talent," said Rains.

Abel Band also is encouraging its em-

## EMPLOYEES NATIONWIDE

### THIRD QUARTER 2008

	JULY	AUGUST	SEPTEMBER
Total private	116 million	115.9 million	115 million
Total professional 18 million and business services	18 million	18 million	17.94 million
Legal services	1.18 million	1.17 million	1.16 million
NOVEMBER (PRELIMINARY)			
Total private: 114 million			
Professional and business services: 17.66 million			
Legal services: 1.17 million			

Note: Total private does not include government employees and does not measure agricultural workers. Numbers are not seasonally adjusted.

SOURCE: Bureau of Labor Statistics

ployees to be willing to take on new tasks and responsibilities, Rains said. "Eventually this downturn will turn around, and we want to be well positioned."

That law firms are still prepared to pay recruiting firms top dollar is a good sign, said Brian Lieberman, director of Argus Legal, a recruiting firm based in Tampa that works with both support staff and attorneys. "The reality is we are doing well."

Growth may be slower than it once was, but firms are doing more with less staff, said Lieberman, and people are being cautious. "It's more of a mental attitude than anything else."

The layoffs in New York and Washington sent shock waves across the legal community and lawyers just coming out of law school are facing a tough market, said David Pedreira of MillerBlowers Inc., an attorney placement firm headquartered in Tampa.

Still, there's hope for lawyers and other legal professionals. If people are strategic in their search they can find a job, Pedreira said.