

Firm Sends Thousands of Letters to Find Attorneys for Satellites

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When Albany-based Tully Rinckey decided to open satellite offices, the 44 lawyer firm eschewed turning to a recruiter or placing classified ads. Instead, firm leaders targeted 9,100 attorneys in the Rochester and Buffalo areas and sent letters touting the firm's attributes and inviting interested attorneys to apply.

"We are currently assessing the Rochester and Buffalo markets, and I am interested in hearing from any Western New York attorneys who would like to work for a growing, innovative, and profitable law firm," writes Greg Rinckey, the firm's managing partner. "You can expect to be fairly compensated for the work you bring in."

Founding partner Mathew Tully said similar recruitment letters brought in more than 500 responses when the firm opened a Syracuse office in August. The firm has hired three attorneys in Syracuse and recently hired three more. Five of these six hires had responded to the firm's letters.

Tully Rinckey is expecting a healthy response this time, too. "We anticipate the entire month of October to be dealing with applicant screening," Tully said.

The firm's name partners would like to see Rochester and Buffalo offices open early next year, with 10 lawyers in each office by the end of 2013. The offices will handle a range of matters, including litigation, matrimonial, trusts and estates, immigration and criminal defense, Tully said.

Tully, a lieutenant colonel in the New York National Guard, spoke to the Law Journal from a base in Afghanistan where he is serving. He was recently awarded the Purple Heart after being wounded in a suicide bombing in August and is expected to return to the firm next spring.

The firm, founded in 2004, expects to see revenues exceed \$10 million this year, Tully said, up from \$7.1 million last year.

Tully Rinckey's fuel for growth comes from work handled out of its Washington, D.C., office representing federal government employees and members of the military in administrative proceedings and litigation against the government. The firm's Washington office makes up at least half of its business.

"We have done very well with numerous high-profile litigations against the federal government which has generated a great deal of money for the firm," Tully said.

He said he and Rinckey decided to invest in the firm, and have plans to open offices in

Binghamton and Plattsburgh in a few years and a Manhattan office in five years.

The firm is aiming to develop its corporate and commercial practice to provide legal services to general counsel, in particular those in Manhattan who need attorneys upstate. "We know from our discussions with general counsel that they prefer firms with a statewide presence, which is one of the many motivating factors for opening offices upstate," said firm spokesman Graig Cortelyou.

The letter campaign serves many purposes, Tully said. In addition to recruiting, it builds relationships for referrals and puts the firm on the radar of lawyers who may not be thinking about moving. That's not to mention the boost in marketing, he added.

William Brennan, a law firm consultant at Altman Weil, said Tully Rinckey's "aggressive marketing technique is an indication of just how competitive the legal marketplace has become." The firm's tactic is "the most aggressive marketing technique I've heard of to date."

"It's guerilla marketing at its best," he said, but he warned it risks being perceived as unprofessional.

Tully said he doesn't believe the letter campaign can be perceived as unprofessional, but some firms may see it as poaching. "People are free to change employment as they wish," he said.

Tully said applicants are screened for disciplinary or malpractice issues, as well as job history. "We're not interested in people who move around every six months," he said. "We want people who are going to be around for a long time."

The firm also looks for attorneys with all levels of experience, books of business and the right personality.

"Our initial target base is middle-class persons, and we want to make sure our attorneys understand that's our bread and butter. Business CEOs are important but if you can't talk to my father, a middle class guy on Long Island, you're going to have a problem with our firm," Tully said.

He said the firm pays better than most others in a given location and practice area. A criminal defense associate in Rochester or Buffalo may be paid \$70,000 to \$75,000, he said.

The letter also addresses the needs of solo practitioners looking toward retirement. "Having a succession plan for your legal practice with a larger firm is a good way to ensure your clients are well taken care of while you enjoy your life after the law," the letter says.