

Former Paratrooper Defends Soldiers' Rights; Builds Law Firm

When the first terrorist plane slammed into the building next door, Mathew Tully fled for his life from his job as a corporate attorney for Morgan Stanley, which had offices on the 65th floor of One World Trade Center in Manhattan.

Tully, a former active duty Army paratrooper, spent the next month at Ground Zero as an officer with the New York Army National Guard. By then, Tully and his wife, Kimberly, had moved to their ski house in Hunter, Greene County.

In January 2003, Tully hung out a shingle to practice the kind of law he knew from experience: Federal employment law with an emphasis on military clients.

In February 2004, he teamed up with a classmate from Hofstra University, Greg Rinckey, to open Tully Rinckey PLLC in Colonie. "With all the travel we do, we needed to be close to an airport," Tully said.

The temporarily booming business of federal military employment law routinely draws Tully and colleagues to Boston and Washington. They have clients in Texas and California.

"After 12 months in business, we grew our billings from \$100,000 a year to \$300,000," Tully said. For 2005, he anticipates revenues of more than \$2 million.

The firm has seven lawyers and expects to add two more in January.

Part of the boost came from the calls to active duty of military reservists and members of the National Guard.

Some of them, particularly federal employees, had disputes over paid leave time credited to their accounts while in military service.

The settlements in these cases are in the range of \$1,500 to \$3,000 in most cases. Multiply that because we operate in volume. This week alone we got 100 cases.

Returning military personnel sometimes encounter roadblocks to the law that guarantees them a job.

There are only about 40 attorneys in the I county who understand and practice this kind of law. We have five of the 40."

Since 9/11, there have been about 440,000 military call-ups, according to Samuel Wright of the National Committee for Employers Support of the Guard and Reserve in Arlington, Va.

Each year the committee fields about 25,000 inquiries about re-employment rights. Information about the law is available on the Web site www.esgr.org.

Wright acknowledged that Tully has carved out an exclusive niche in his handling of the intricacies of federal re-employment rights. A one-time federal corrections officer in New York

City, Tully naturally drifted toward employment through his association with the fraternal organization for law enforcement officers.

Tully estimates that federal employment law accounts for about half the firm's business. Because he is aware that conditions likely will change, he and his associates aim to build on their practices of criminal and family law. Tully wants to add a specialist for trusts and estates.

There's another reason Tully is willing to assist other military veterans.

"I find it disgusting that an employer would take out any kind of retaliation on an employee who is risking his life for the country. The last thing an employee should be worried about is will they have a job to feed their children when they get back."