

BLJ Editor's Notebook: Aggressive recruiting a reality

By Michael Petro

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In the previous edition, we did a story on a law firm whose founding partner recently returned from a military stint to once again practice as a full-time attorney and get back to overseeing the firm. Matt Tully of Tully Rinckey PLLC said he sees Buffalo as the “bedrock” for his Albany-based firm, which is seeking a broader identity and brand in New York. The local office, which opened its doors about a year ago and last week moved into larger space in Williamsville, is one of four offices in New York and six in three states. The Albany office, which houses most of the firm’s 50 attorneys, sees much of its efforts taken up by state government issues so Tully is looking to make his mark in Buffalo with a diverse and talented pool of attorneys. The plan is have the Buffalo attorneys work in their practices locally, as well as statewide for cut-rate prices. It’s a trend that we featured in another recent story. He’s also looking to open an office in New York City next year. The next step here is to recruit top-notch attorneys, he said. The firm has four and will soon stretch that to six, according to Tully. He wants to grow the workforce and he’s not shy about discussing the ways to do it. “When you’re at the top of the game or approaching it, there is usually no incentive to leave the firm that you’ve grown up in,” said Tully, who partnered with Greg Rinckey to build a military and federal employment practice. “What we offer is higher compensation and better benefits because we’re able to go into the higher-priced areas and bring in that business.” He’s been sending recruitment letters to Western New York attorneys in an effort to have them leave their current positions and join his firm. It’s the kind of employee poaching that tends to be frowned upon by more-established firms. He said when the firm originally went to Albany 10 years ago, it used the same style. Now Tully Rinckey is one of the bigger firms in that city. He believes it’s a necessary part of the process when looking to build in a place where the firm has no prior connections. As in any industry, he said, to provide the best service, a firm needs to secure top professionals. “There is some resistance,” said Tully, whose firm has offices in Rochester, Syracuse, Washington D.C. and Virginia. “We’ve had people call us up about the mass mailing and tell us, ‘That type of aggressive nature doesn’t work in Buffalo.’ I realize many of our approaches aren’t well-received by the older firms in Buffalo, but we’re used to that by now.” His attorneys and prospective ones should enjoy a major advantage because of Tully Rinckey creating what he described as an award-winning marketing department, which helps strip away the business side of the work for his lawyers. “I think our marketing department would rival any stand-alone public relations company in Upstate New York, both in size and quality of media placements. It’s the advent of advanced marketing,” he said. He was in town to mark the firm’s move from Niagara Street to new 11-suite, 5,000-square-foot office at 5488 Sheridan Drive. To gauge some of the ways that area law firms are increasing

staff, I contacted Lippes Mathias Wexler Friedman LLP, which recently added two attorneys in Buffalo. "While we don't limit ourselves to any one avenue when it comes to recruiting talented attorneys to join our firm, we approach each new hire as a unique case," said Gerald Wohlleber, COO. "We believe the best judges of talent are the attorneys who are already part of our team." What if you don't have that team assembled yet in a particular city? It can't be easy starting a law firm, a business that thrives on connections, in an unfamiliar place like Tully Rinckey did? Wohlleber said when his firm is looking to hire an experienced attorney, he targets the Bar Association and regional legal publications with employment ads. When in search of a first-year associate, the firm often taps into its longtime relationship with SUNY Buffalo Law School. To find an attorney who focuses on a specific industry, he may contact an outside employment recruiter. Tully, who retired from the military after two decades of service, said an aggressive approach works best for him and his firm. "As I tell people who call me up and tell me I'm too aggressive, 'You're darn right I am.' You don't go from not being in the (Business First) Book of Lists to being in the top 10 (Western New York law firms) by always playing nice in the sandbox," he said. "Sometimes you have to kick a little sand." Time will tell if that approach helps Tully Rinckey ultimately make use of that same sand to build a castle here in Buffalo.