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Firm makes strides in stressing diversity



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Legal News

While striving to create a more diverse firm, Grand Rapids-based Warner, Norcross, & Judd continued to benchmark its success with its second Diversity Annual Report for 2007.

Overall, the firm, which also has offices in Lansing, Holland, Southfield, and Muskegon, has seen some improvement.

"This is a work in progress," said Rodney Martin, diversity partner at Warner, Norcross, & Judd. "I wouldn't tell you that we've arrived, but we are making strides toward achieving our goal of being a diverse and inclusive firm."

"We've been doing very well with bringing in women and minorities as associates but as we expand the firm through lateral hiring we would like to also have similar success."

According to the report, of all associates hired in 2007 48.4% were women and 18.8% were minorities and new associates hired by gender were 55.6% female to 44.4% male, while 22.2% of new associates hired were minorities.

In the report, managing partner Douglas E. Wagner writes that he is pleased with the progress the firm made during 2007, "a year during which we rolled up our sleeves and implemented key structural elements for our programs. Strong building blocks are critical to ensure our long-term success in such areas as recruitment, retention, mentoring, education and evaluation."

Some of the key structural elements noted in the report were expanded recruitment, retention and advancement initiatives; enhanced leadership and mentoring opportunities for women attorneys; new practices and initiatives; ongoing educational and sponsorship opportunities; and self-evaluation.

In efforts to expand recruitment, retention and advancement initiatives, Warner, Norcross, & Judd instituted training to facilitate behavior-based interviewing; expanded the list of law schools from which they recruit; increased the number of

minority job fairs they attended; hired a Detroit-based minority-owned recruiting firm in order to identify lateral candidates; continued to implement programs designed to expand the pipeline of minority lawyers; made practice groups responsible to distribute career-enhancing projects equitably; and evaluating how work is assigned.

"You have to prepare the firm for (diversity)," Martin said. "You have to make sure that everyone that comes into the firm is welcome and that's what the structural keys are aimed at."

Warner, Norcross, & Judd, according to Wagner's letter in the report, "believe(s) that our differences in heritage, culture and gender make us better to serve our clients."

"The world is flat," Martin said. "We are in a global economy and we have to be culturally competent to deal with that. Our effort is going to keep us in the forefront of being able to do that."