

Duane Morris

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Friday, March 02, 2007 --- Labor and employment lawyer Thomas G. Servodidio has never worked anywhere but Duane Morris LLP since graduating from law school in 1987. Eve I. Klein, another bigwig in the firm's labor and employment group, has been at Duane Morris since 1997.

They are only two of the many attorneys that have been there a long time, Servodidio said, which gives the firm's clients institutional stability not found elsewhere.

"It's not unusual within the firm," Servodidio said of spending one's whole career in the same place. "But it's very unusual outside the firm."

"Our firm is very entrepreneurial, just like our clients," he added.

Nonetheless, Duane Morris' clients are not just interested in longevity and creativity. With about 40 employment attorneys spread throughout Philadelphia, Atlanta, New York, New Jersey, Chicago and California, the firm also has a broad reach, Servodidio said.

"Our vision is to have employment lawyers on the ground in all the major metro areas that we service," said Servodidio, who chairs the practice group.

"If you actually have to go to court, it helps to have someone on the ground," added Klein, a partner at the firm.

Having attorneys spread throughout the country helps not only in state court, but also in federal court, Klein said.

"Even though the federal laws are uniform, it's better to have someone knowledgeable on a local district," she added.

Duane Morris does not have the most extensive employment practice group in the country, but it is growing. According to Law360's survey of the top 300 firms, Duane Morris was ranked 34th in terms of the number of new federal employment cases taken on in 2006, up from 49th the year before.

Overall, the firm took on 59 new cases last year, up from 37 in 2005.

Moreover, at the end of last year it bolstered its East Coast employment and immigration practice group by adding Celeste Wasielewski, formerly of DLA Piper Rudnick Gray Cary US LLP, in Washington D.C., and Annette A.

Idalski, formerly of Hunton & Williams LLP, in Atlanta.

It has also expanded to London and Singapore to help international clients that want to do business in the United States.

“We’re developing a national footprint and an international footprint that allows us to effectively compete,” Servodidio said.

According to Servodidio, his first job as an employment attorney is to provide advice and counsel to help clients comply with the law. He also works in traditional labor law, which involves collective bargaining agreements and disputes before the National Labor Relations Board, among other things.

Thirdly, Servodidio litigates Title VII and other employment cases when necessary.

“We need to be effective trial lawyers,” he said, adding that he oftentimes works with the general counsels of companies and also with Duane Morris attorneys outside the employment and immigration practice group.

Among the firm’s representative clients are AT&T Corp., SAP AG, Allied-Barton Security Services and Clarkston Consulting.

As far as specific cases go, the firm recently won a race discrimination suit in Chicago that had moved to the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Seventh Circuit. It also obtained a successful verdict in a suit against an insurance company that alleged breach of a collective bargaining agreement, and it won a summary judgment order for a national cable television provider that had been accused of violating the Fair Labor Standards Act.

What makes Duane Morris unique among large general firms is that it also has a sizeable immigration group, Servodidio said.

“Many of our corporate clients are relying more and more on foreign workers,” he said. “We need to make sure that their paperwork is in order.”

Furthermore, Duane Morris also has a lobbying arm for clients that prefer to proceed that way.

“When clients have issues that can’t be resolved in court, they may want to change statutes,” Klein said.

As far as trends go, the Duane Morris attorneys said they were seeing more intense organizing efforts on the part of labor unions, especially in the health care industry.

“The unions’ mindset is similar to many companies and even law firms,” Klein said. “They feel they need to merge into one global powerhouse.”

Since the Supreme Court’s June 22 decision in Burlington Northern v. White,

the attorneys also said they are seeing more retaliation cases.

Overall, Duane Morris has about 650 lawyers in 18 U.S. offices and two international offices.