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## MCCA CEO to Lead Duane Morris' Diversity Initiatives

BY GINA PASSARELLA

**T**he outgoing CEO of the Minority Corporate Counsel Association will be joining Duane Morris as chief diversity and inclusion officer in January 2016.

Joseph K. West, who announced last month that he would step down as CEO of the MCCA by year's end to pursue another opportunity, is set to join Duane Morris' Washington, D.C., office as a partner in the litigation group and leader of the firm's diversity efforts, succeeding Nolan Atkinson Jr. West will take over from Atkinson, who has been appointed the city of Philadelphia's first chief diversity and inclusion officer.

West, a former in-house counsel with Wal-Mart and Entergy, said he looks forward to not only working on diversity initiatives, but also building up his litigation practice.

Duane Morris chairman John Soroko said the firm was looking for the next leader of its diversity initiatives as Atkinson was thinking of stepping down from the role. Talks with West about the possibility of



**Joseph K. West**

*Kent Miller*

his taking over the position began several months ago, Soroko said.

"It started with the chief diversity and inclusion officer role, but I also quickly realized that, in Joe, we had

someone who I think can also make a very significant impact as a litigator, as a business-gatherer and as a potential key focal point for recruitment in the D.C. office," Soroko said.

Soroko said he viewed it as a positive to have a firmwide leadership role based outside of the firm's Philadelphia headquarters.

As head of Duane Morris' diversity initiatives, Soroko said he is looking for West to continue the innovative projects the firm has implemented under Atkinson and add his own unique ideas. Duane Morris currently hosts lecture series on diversity issues, publishes a diversity and inclusion newsletter and operates a number of diversity committees, Soroko said.

West said he has become familiar with Duane Morris over the years and said Atkinson and Soroko were integral in his deciding to join the firm.

West took over as CEO of the MCCA in 2011 and its membership has tripled in that time, the organization said. Prior to joining the MCCA, West was associate general counsel of Wal-Mart Stores Inc., where he led the outside general counsel management group. In that role, West oversaw more than 600 law firms and a \$300 million legal spend. He also served in Wal-Mart's class action division, revamped the company's outside counsel guidelines and introduced value-based billing practices.

Before joining Wal-Mart, West had served as assistant general counsel of New Orleans-based utility company Entergy Corp.

"I know firsthand that Joe brings elite litigation skills and broad experience as a national leader on diversity and inclusion issues," Entergy general counsel Marcus Brown said in a statement. "During his time at Entergy, he honed those talents to a fine point and it's been a pleasure to watch him continue to cultivate his skills."

At the MCCA, West created programs aimed at expanding opportunities for minorities and women in the legal profession. He formed the MCCA Academy for Leadership and Inclusion, which served as a training program for corporate law departments and law firms aimed at identifying and eliminating obstacles to inclusion. He also created attorney skills and business development programs.

"When Joe became CEO, he promised to strengthen the reach, effectiveness and impact of MCCA," said the organization's chair, Gap general counsel Michelle Banks, in a statement.

Banks said West and his team did exactly that.

One of West's mentors has been former DuPont general counsel and current Ballard Spahr partner Tom Sager, who has also been a champion of diversity initiatives in the legal industry. Sager is also known to the MCCA, which gives out an annual Thomas L. Sager award to law firms demonstrating commitment to diversity initiatives.

Sager said West reached out to him when he was thinking of going for the CEO position at the MCCA and Sager encouraged his bid for the job. Sager said West was perfect for the role. He is passionate about diversity, an "incredibly good communicator," and had a huge network given his work with so many different law firms while in-house at Wal-Mart. In his time at the MCCA, Sager said, West drove more accountability among the association's staff and developed programs that will be sustainable upon his departure.

Sager said West was looking to return to private practice for personal reasons.

"It's a great move on their part," Sager said of Duane Morris' decision to hire West. "I'm sure he will generate a lot of business for them in any number of ways. He's just a very likeable guy."

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