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New lawyers find strong job market

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Recruiting and hiring of new law school grads by law firms nationwide this year is expected to be the strongest since the recession.

A new report by the National Association for Law Placement said 95 percent of 2015 summer associates — law students who will graduate this year — received job offers, the highest percentage in 20 years and in contrast to 2009 when just 69 percent received bids. Some 59 percent of law firms said they made more offers for summer 2016 associate posts than they did a year ago.

Although Pittsburgh firms were included in NALP's survey, breakout data for the region was not available. But calls to some of Pittsburgh's largest firms indicated that they're in line with the national findings.



JOE WOJCIK

Timothy Ryan, Eckert Seamans Cherin & Mellott LLC.

Eckert Seamans Cherin & Mellott LLC, No. 4 among local firms by size, eliminated its summer program in 2007 but is reinstating it for summer 2016.

"We're re-entering in a measured way with two and expect to increase the program," said CEO Timothy Ryan. "We see some rationalization to first-year compensation in the marketplace and it makes sense for us to again make first-year hires. And we see the need, given our growth, for a larger number of younger associates."

Cohen & Grigsby PC expects five summer associates this year. It had four associates last summer and made offers to all.

"These are the lawyers who'll be the future of the firm," said Noland Cheung, a Cohen & Grigsby director and chair of the firm's hiring committee. "It's nice to bring in folks who know the culture. We've been pretty consistent and try to hire from Pitt and Duquesne."

Buchanan Ingersoll & Rooney PC, the city's third-largest firm, has yet to determine the final count for its summer 2016 program, but expects it to at least match and possibly top the seven it hosted last summer. In 2015, Buchanan had four second-year and three-first-year students — only the former are eligible for hire. Offers were made to four.

Bucking the trend was Reed Smith LLP, which has more lawyers downtown than any firm in Pittsburgh. Reed Smith expects six summer associates, down from nine last year. But Courtney Horrigan, a partner and head of the Pittsburgh office's recruiting committee, said it's to make room for other young candidates.

"We've been seeing a great increase in (third-year) candidates who have fantastic credentials but either did not have an interest in Pittsburgh when they were looking for summer positions during their second year or had a change in focus and are reaching out to us," she said. "And a lot of people who are interested in litigation go into clerkships for federal judges who send them to us (when the clerkships end). It's frustrating to me sometimes when we have these stellar

candidates who have great connections and experience and we don't have an entry-level opening. So we held back on a number of positions so they can be considered part of the mix."

Of the nine summer associates in 2015, seven were second-year law students and all received job offers. The two first-year students are returning as part of the summer 2016 crew, said John Buchanan, Reed Smith's San Francisco-based director of public relations.

James Leipold, NALP executive director, said the activity may be driven by some firms being "spooked by not having enough mid-level associates to do the work coming in" due to the post recession slowdown in hiring. He believes that, at least in the short-term, law firm recruiting activity for summer programs will remain brisk.

Lori Carpenter, president of recruitment firm Carpenter Legal Search, said she has heard of an uptick in summer associate and new associate hiring from Pittsburgh law firm clients.

"Corporate and real estate associates were in little demand during the recession, and with few being trained at that time, there is now a dearth," Carpenter said. "We rarely see the same highs or lows as in many other cities. I do not believe the uptick is as great in Pittsburgh as in New York or Washington, D.C.. Regardless, with difficulties in directly acquiring laterals from an extremely limited talent pool from other cities, firms are again considering alternatives to their recruiting initiatives."

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