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Increase in patent cases could fuel hiring boom

Premium content from Pittsburgh Business Times by Patty Tascarella, Senior Reporter

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A boost in patent cases tried locally could ignite an already hot area for hiring.

[Maura McAnney](#), co-owner of legal recruitment firm McAnney Esposito & Kraybill Associates, said demand for patent attorneys is constant. Candidates though are in short supply.

"It's always been a surprisingly small market because lawyers have to decide very early on that they want to specialize in patent law," McAnney said.

"You have to have a degree in a scientific area before you can apply to the patent bar. That's not a typical combination."

The fact that law firms have cut back since the recession on their summer associate programs — a favored means for recruitment since most of these law students receive a job offer — also is impacting future ranks.

So there are fewer opportunities for young lawyers to get on-the-job training.

Experienced lawyers, called lateral hires, are preferred by most firms because they don't have to invest in training them, and they bring a book of business and connections.

"We find law firms and corporations like experienced lawyers because they've committed themselves to this particular area of practice and they've committed themselves to this region," McAnney said. "That may mean someone who's likely to stay longer."

Patent law falls under the broader category of intellectual property. But practitioners also may have an area of expertise within an industry sector.

[Lori Carpenter](#), president of Carpenter Legal Search, a downtown-based recruitment firm, said clients looking to add a patent lawyer often have very specific needs, which may make candidates more difficult to find.

"Each organization (law firm or corporation) wants an experienced lawyer with a background in chemical, or electrical or mechanical," Carpenter said. "And they want industry expertise on top of that. Patent lawyers are some of the highest-paid lawyers in the industry."

According to www.patentattorneysalary.org, the average yearly patent lawyer's salary ranges between \$80,240 and \$120,360.

Pittsburgh's average is on the high end at \$119,155.

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