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Financial District

Recent law school grads face steeper climb at local firms

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A newly minted attorney hired last year by a Pittsburgh firm with 10 lawyers or less would have drawn the lowest mean salary in a field of 26 major metros, a modest \$47,881. That compares to \$69,706 in Washington, D.C., the top salary, according to a newly compiled report.

If said lawyer joined a firm here with more than 250 attorneys, the mean salary was \$125,303, which puts Pittsburgh in the lower-third of the field.

Pittsburgh law firms aren't paying top dollar to new graduates, concludes the National Association for Law Placement report "Jobs and JDs Class of 2014." NALP's figures are based on salaries reported for full-time jobs lasting at least a year.

The highest mean starting salary was \$159,130, paid by large firms in Austin, Texas, with New York coming in second at \$158,882.

Very few firms with offices in multiple cities pay the same starting salary in each office, a trend that's become more pronounced over the past decade. The largest firms pay less in secondary markets like Pittsburgh compared to New York, Los Angeles and Washington, D.C.

Lori Carpenter, CEO of downtown-based recruitment firm **Carpenter Legal Search**, said it's difficult to compare Pittsburgh salaries to other cities without considering the lower cost of living. A buck goes further here and that has appeal.

"You have to step back and say, 'What is that compensation comparable to?'" she said. "We're seeing lawyers working in San Francisco and Chicago looking to come back here

because they can have a great standard of living and not travel as far. They are renting out their parking spaces for \$600 a month in San Francisco.”

Robert Denney, head of **Robert Denney Associates**, a Paoli, Pa.-based consultancy that advises law firms across the country, including some in Pittsburgh, said larger cities have more big firms that compete against each other for talent, driving up salaries.

“The overall competition isn’t there like it is in New York, Philadelphia, Chicago, Los Angeles,” Denney said.

Judith Collins, NALP director of research, said starting salaries were “virtually flat” compared to the prior year but couldn’t provide further Pittsburgh-specific detail. Nationally, the overall median salary was \$95,000. That was still off the high of \$130,000 in 2009. The recession took a toll with the median falling to \$85,000 in 2011 and slowly climbing back up.

Denney, believes future salary growth will continue at a snail’s pace.

“I don’t think we’ll see the continued increases in salaries that occurred prerecession,” he said. “It depends on the marketplace.”

Pay Scales of Justice.png

CLOSER LOOK

PAY SCALES OF JUSTICE

Here’s a sampling of how starting salaries paid to lawyers in Pittsburgh stack up against other cities.

FIRMS WITH 10 LAWYERS OR LESS		FIRMS WITH 251+ LAWYERS	
City	Mean salary	City	Mean salary
Washington, D.C.	\$69,706	Austin	\$159,130
New Orleans	\$66,091	New York	\$158,882
San Francisco	\$65,704	Dallas	\$157,626
Philadelphia	\$59,743	Chicago	\$152,938
New York	\$59,195	Los Angeles	\$154,358
Los Angeles	\$58,737	Cleveland	\$136,074
Chicago	\$53,523	Philadelphia	\$131,524
Indianapolis	\$48,845	Pittsburgh	\$125,303
Cleveland	\$48,000	Minneapolis	\$109,323
Pittsburgh	\$47,881	New Orleans	\$98,400

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR LAW PLACEMENT

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