

Taking international law firm networking to the next level

BY KATHRYN LEGER, FREELANCE MAY 6, 2011

When a Florida law firm had a client that wanted to purchase a hotel in Montreal, they called upon Quebec's BCF LLP for help working on the deal.

The contact, made by Orlando's Lowndes, Drosdick, Doster, Kantor & Reed, P.A., through a global affiliation of law firms called Meritas, provided about eight months of work for BCF real estate lawyers and generated legal fees in excess of \$500,000.

Later, an additional "significant amount of fees" were generated when the hotel investment in question converted to a REIT - or real estate investment trust, says André Ryan, the BCF lawyer who manages the firm's membership in Meritas, a network of 173 law firms with an estimated 7,000 lawyers on five continents.

Now BCF is taking international law-firm networking to a new level as Montreal hosts a three-day conference next week that will see about 350 lawyers from Meritas member firms from Canada, the United States and 54 other countries make personal and business connections and discuss client needs while learning about new marketing and business trends.

In addition to showcasing the firm, Ryan said BCF sees the Meritas meet as a chance to promote foreign investment in Quebec.

"It is not 350 lawyers coming, it is the people (clients) they represent," Ryan said. "We see a great period of foreign investment coming," he added, referring to the Quebec government's Plan Nord to develop natural resources in Northern Quebec, expected to be detailed in the near future.

"Our decision to join an affiliation like Meritas (in 1999) is our strategic answer to globalization," Ryan said. Almost half the membership now comes from countries other than the United States, and with all inbound and outbound referral work monitored by the organization, it provides not only references for law firms but individual lawyers in countries where local clients may want to expand business activities.

Among those promoting investment and the global view at the Meritas conference will be guest speaker and Quebec City-born Pierre Pettigrew, the former federal Liberal foreign affairs and international trade minister, who is now an executive adviser for the international activities for the Canadian division of Deloitte Touche Tohmatsu.

Sure to add sizzle will be a talk - and news conference - with Mark Stephens, the attorney to WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange. Central London law firm Finers Stephens Innocent LLP is a Meritas member.

BCF is not the only Quebec law firm taking advantage of international law-firm alliances like Meritas for inbound and outbound work. Blake, Cassels & Graydon LLP is a member firm of Lex Mundi; Robinson Sheppard Shapiro LLP has the International Lawyers Network; Lapointe Rosenstein Marchand

Melançon LLP is allied with TerraLex (Bruno Floriani is now on the board and co-vice-chair of the organization's practice groups); Gascon & Associates is part of Legal Network International and Franklin & Franklin is a member of World Link for Law.

Danielle Ferron has left Borden Ladner Gervais LLP after 10 years to join Langlois Kronström Desjardins LLP, where she will be co-chair of the 46-lawyer litigation group (along with Richard Ramsay of LKD's Quebec City office) as well with continuing her practice in banking litigation, complex litigation files, including class actions. Ferron, who worked at Montreal's Stein & Stein LLP before BLG, is also a specialist in anti-fraud cases and the use of special orders, like Anton Piller orders, to seize evidence.

Jean-Marc Clément, a lawyer specialized in customs and imports and exports, has joined the international tax and business law team at the Montreal office of BCF. Clément previously worked as a senior manager for customs and international trade consulting at PricewaterhouseCoopers in Montreal for more than 10 years and Omnitrans Inc., a customs brokerage and freight forwarder.

Smart & Biggar/Fetherstonhaugh's Montreal office, directed by managing partner François Guay, is relishing the firm's recent win of four awards - Canadian IP Firm of the Year, Canadian Trademark Prosecution Firm of the Year, the Canadian Trademark Contentious Firm of the Year and honoured for having successfully handled the Canadian Case of the Year (the Amazon.com "one-click case") - by Managing Intellectual Property, the British publication that tracks global IP legal developments.

Frédéric Carle, a solo practitioner in criminal law, has been acclaimed as the new president for 2011-12 for the Young Bar Association of Montreal (AJBM). Carle is the first graduate of the law faculty of Université du Québec à Montréal in the history of the AJBM and the first criminal lawyer to head the organization since Claire Barrette Joncas's mandate in 1962-63.

The Lawyer of the Week profiled in an upcoming interview on Legal Matters, The Gazette's online Legal Page at www.montrealgazette.com/legalmatters is Elizabeth Greene. She is the Montreal family lawyer and mediator who this week became bâtonnière, or head, of the Montreal Bar, the professional order for 13,500 lawyers in Montreal.

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