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Law firm enjoys long-time attorneys, staff

By LISA KOVACH

Twenty-five years ago, Rick McCarthy was in his third year of law school and had reduced his job offers down to a final two. He could take a job with a large law firm in Los Angeles, where he would be one of 35 new lawyers, or he could accept a job with **Solomon Ward Seidenwurm & Smith LLP**, a San Diego law firm where he would become the seventh attorney in the office.

McCarthy took the job with Solomon Ward and while his title has changed throughout the years, the name of the law firm next to his name hasn't.

"I chose Solomon Ward because they just really seemed to have a great core of people," McCarthy said. "At the time I was really worried if I was doing the right thing, but it has all worked out."

The majority of the staff at Solomon Ward are long-time employees.

In his 25 years with the firm, half of McCarthy's lifetime, he has had only three secretaries, with his current secretary working with him for the last 13 years.

"We have an amazing collection of people at Solomon Ward that have remained tight-knit and small in numbers," McCarthy said.

The firm, which has had only one change to its name, recently celebrated its 30th anniversary.

McCarthy's practice areas include business litigation and construction law. His resume includes multiple successful outcomes in high stakes matters. McCarthy notes that the key to the firm's longevity and its ability to retain its employees is the unique atmosphere of the firm.

"The amount of professional freedom that you have in terms of the area of practice and the lack of corporate mentality is extremely significant (to the firm's success)," McCarthy said.

"You don't have the same opportunities for disputes at Solomon Ward that you would at other firms. As a partner at our firm you don't have anyone telling you what to do. I envision that I would have a tough time enjoying that same latitude of freedom at another law firm."

The firm's collegial atmosphere is an important ingredient to the firm's success. That atmosphere is fostered both inside and outside of the office.

Solomon Ward offers an annual partners' retreat, where spouses are encouraged to attend, at destinations such as Cabo San Lucas, Borrego Springs, Palm Springs and Napa. Partners also meet occasionally for dinner and have lunch on a regular basis.

"There is really a lot of cohesion among the staff," he said. "You really become a part of a family."

With significant tenure under his belt, McCarthy is not alone in his longevity with the firm.

Norman Smith and Miguel Smith (no relation) have each been with the firm for at least 20 years.

Norman was hired one month after McCarthy. Before joining Solomon Ward, he was a partner in a law firm in Johannesburg, South Africa. Being educated and practicing law in South Africa has proven to be an excellent foundation for Norman's successful international law practice. His practice also includes corporate and business law, and business litigation.

“The firm’s founding partners Herb Solomon, Bill Ward and Rick Seidenwurm, established very high standards and values for the firm, which we strive to maintain,” Norman said.

“They have also been outstanding mentors to many of the firm’s lawyers, which has helped to ensure the continuity of these standards and values.”

Like McCarthy, Solomon Ward was also Miguel’s first job out of law school.

“I was interviewed on the University of San Diego Law School campus and was invited to come meet the firm. I got a call from Rick Seidenwurm, one of the founding partners, who became my mentor, and I took the job,” Miguel said.

Miguel is a real estate attorney representing all types of clients – landlords, tenants, lenders, developers and more -- in all aspects of real estate transactions. He is quick to point to the unique culture at Solomon Ward as a significant reason why he enjoys working at the firm.

“Everyone gets along and likes working together, and that has been the case for a long time,” Miguel said. “You get great support and training here. The firm does high quality work and we constantly strive to keep our work quality high. I have never been convinced that any other firm is better.”

The firm boasts 18 partners, nine associates, three of counsel and more than 30 non-attorney staff members. With 30 attorneys total, Solomon Ward ranks within the top 25 San Diego law firms in terms of size. While many other local law firms have been in existence 30 or more years, few have chosen the slow and steady growth course of Solomon Ward.

The firm approaches the business of law differently from other law firms and its attorneys are savvy enough to know that this would be lost if Solomon Ward were to merge with a bigger entity.

By staying relatively small, the firm controls its own fate and is able to implement a “democratic way of doing business.”

“All significant decisions require a majority vote of all the partners,” said Herb Solomon, one of the firm’s founders. “The role of our managing partner is to implement the policies of the partners.”

The firm also utilizes an objective form of profit sharing, where compensation is based on a formula that has no subjective components. Partners have no minimum billing requirements, affording them the luxury of taking time off when needed.

Solomon Ward offers a comprehensive mix of transactional and litigation services ranging from business and corporate law, real estate and construction law, employment law, international law, taxation, trust and estates, bankruptcy and insolvency to most types of business litigation and even personal injury.

The firm boasts an interesting mix of Fortune 500 companies, startups and variety of businesses that turn to Solomon Ward for legal counsel. Some of the firm's clients, including ConAm Properties and American Assets, have been with Solomon Ward for its entire 30-year history. Other current clients include Hansen Beverage, Kontron, DPR Construction and Barbeques Galore.

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