

The pick of the crop, pt. II

Canadian Lawyer's list of the top 10 boutique firms in litigation.

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Issue Date: March 2010

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Canada's litigation boutiques show that size certainly doesn't factor in for clients in need of top-quality representation. While these firms may not offer the depth of legal talent the big firms boast, they rise to the top based on their reputations for successful advocacy in courts throughout the land. As several lawyers pointed out, at the end of the day clients are simply looking for the best legal minds for the work they need done. And if they reside at a firm without a Bay Street address, well, so be it.

Top 10 Litigation Boutiques

Hill Sokalski Vincent Walsh Trippier

With 10 lawyers making it Winnipeg's largest litigation boutique, this firm has punched above its weight, representing the Government of Canada in its battle against the Canadian Wheat Board, while also acting for the feds in a lawsuit by the Manitoba and Canadian Métis federations. In securities litigation, the firm is acting for various mutual fund dealers and brokerage houses in matters before the courts and at the Manitoba Securities Commission. It boasts many alumni who have been elevated to the bench. www.hillco.mb.ca

Hunter Litigation Chambers

Many consider this 18-lawyer Vancouver litigation shop the best in the country. One lawyer says the firm owes its success to the work of three "primo" litigators who call it home, namely John Hunter, William Berardino, and Kenneth McEwan. The firm acts for Imperial Tobacco in its matters against the B.C. government, and forestry companies Western Forest Products Inc. and Canfor Corp. are two top clients. Meanwhile, Hunter recently represented the Law Society of Yukon in its Supreme Court of Canada case on an issue relating to the withdrawal of counsel. www.litigationchambers.com

Lax O'Sullivan Scott LLP

Now housing 13 lawyers, this firm has amassed a sterling reputation since its establishment in 1997, representing a slew of notable clients. Shaw Communications, British American Tobacco, Enbridge Inc., the board of directors of General Motors of Canada, and law firms such as Blakes and McCarthys have all relied on the firm's expertise. One of its founding partners, Justice Eleanore Cronk, is now a judge of the Ontario Court of Appeal. www.counsel-toronto.com

Lerners LLP

While this firm has a London, Ont., office that operates as a full-service shop, its Toronto branch is a litigation boutique that has grown out of the work of Earl Cherniak. He was pulled to Toronto in 1987 due to demand for his expertise, bringing a few juniors along for the ride. The office has now grown to 45 lawyers, and worked on major cases including the seminal employment law case *Honda Canada Inc. v. Keays* at the Supreme Court of Canada. www.lerners.ca

Lenczner Slaght Royce Smith Griffin LLP

Receiving by far the most mentions from Bay Street lawyers and in-house counsel, Lenczner Slaght is clearly the top pick when it comes to Toronto litigation boutiques. "Where they are exceptional is that they have really strong senior talent," says one lawyer, referring to Alan Lenczner, Ron Slaght, Peter Griffin, and Tom Curry. "They have great strength at the top. . . . That's probably what distinguishes them, if you want a leading lawyer." One in-house counsel who refers work says, "They have a style of litigation. . . . You'll just say, 'This is a Lenczner type of file.'" It's no surprise the team of about 40 lawyers has represented the likes of General Electric Co. and McDonald's, while also helping Air Canada through the bankruptcy process and Stelco Inc., now U.S. Steel Canada, through its restructuring. Impressively at www.litigate.com

Merrick Jamieson Sterns Washington & Mahody

This Halifax firm opened its doors in 1998 and eventually attracted all five of its named partners from a local mid-size firm. Merrick Jamieson gets its share of interesting work, including plenty of consumer advocacy, representing the public of Nova Scotia in setting power rates at the province's Utility and Review Board. The seven-lawyer firm is currently involved in most of Halifax's ongoing major litigation. www.mjswm.com

Nathanson Schachter & Thompson LLP

This Vancouver firm has made a name for itself by successfully representing plaintiffs in two of Canada's key mining cases, *Minera Aquiline Argentina SA v. IMA Exploration Inc.*, and *Inmet Mining Corp. v. Homestake Canada Inc.* Its focus is largely on complex commercial matters, including shareholder disputes, takeover bids, securities disputes, professional negligence matters, and administrative proceedings. "They have a terrific team under Irwin Nathanson, who is their top litigator," says one lawyer, who describes Nathanson as "the best lawyer in the country." www.nst.bc.ca

Paliare Roland Rosenberg Rothstein LLP

Paliare Roland burst on the scene in 2001 after Gowling Lafleur Henderson LLP merged with Smith Lyons LLP and a group of litigators split off. Now with 27 lawyers, the firm has been retained on major insolvencies such as those involving Nortel Networks, asset-backed commercial paper, Stelco, and Air Canada. Managing partner Linda Rothstein has built a reputation as counsel for public inquiries. Lawyers from the firm have acted as counsel in various capacities in the Goudge Inquiry into Pediatric Forensic Pathology in Ontario, the Toronto Computer Leasing Inquiry, and to parties with standing at the Walkerton inquiry. www.paliareroland.com

Peacock Linder & Halt LLP

This Calgary firm now has 13 lawyers in its lineup, focusing on an array of energy, financial, and construction litigation. Its lawyers have successfully appeared in the Supreme Court of Canada, Alberta Court of Appeal, Alberta Court of Queen's Bench, Provincial Court and before a broad range of Administrative Tribunals. The firm also acts as counsel in matters involving the Law Society of Alberta's errors and omissions fund. Partners Patrick Peacock, Peter Linder, and Edward Halt — all graduates of Macleod Dixon LLP — established the firm in 1994. www.plhlaw.ca

Woods LLP

With offices in Montreal and Quebec City, this firm has acted on a wide range of key disputes over the past decade. It was counsel for the purchaser of BCE Inc. at the Supreme Court of Canada in *BCE Inc. v. 1976 Debentureholders*, and has successfully fought off class actions on behalf of Blockbuster Canada and GlaxoSmithKline Inc. It has also developed an expertise in arbitration of national and international disputes both as counsel and as arbitrators. The firm's web address says it all: www.litigationboutique.com