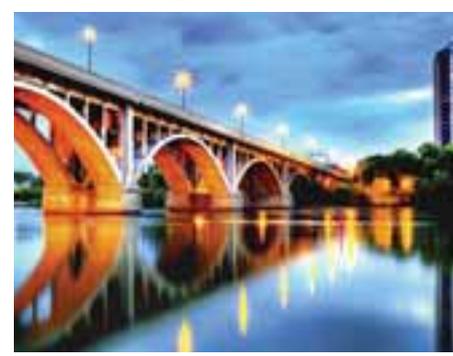


PRAIRIE HEAT

Big deals, an economic boom, exciting challenges, and lots of legal work are bringing lawyers to Manitoba and Saskatchewan like never before.

By Michael McKiernan



Canadian Lawyer returns to the Prairies for our latest regional firm ranking, and it seems we aren't the only ones eyeing the area. "We're continuing to see a flood of resumes from younger lawyers who either trained here, or have past history in the province," says Glen Peters, managing partner of Winnipeg-based Fillmore Riley LLP. "They're people who are well trained, and have worked in big shops in the east or west, but who have made a decision that they want to return. It's a unique opportunity for firms here, and we've certainly taken advantage of it in the last few years."

The chief driver of the Prairie homecoming is a booming economy, according to Gary Young, a senior partner at Saskatoon's Robertson Stromberg LLP, which moved up our list this year. Historically, he says young lawyers viewed Saskatchewan firms as a stepping-stone to higher-profile work in Toronto, Vancouver, Calgary, or Edmonton. Now that trend is reversing: one of his most recent hires was a returnee from Alberta. "That was primarily a function of what's available here at the moment. Things are so hot in Saskatchewan that this is where some of the best deals are right now. It's a good time to be here," says Young. "As long as that

kind of transactional work is available, we're going to have no trouble recruiting."

At McKercher LLP, another repeat honoree on our list, executive partner Alan McIntyre says the region is particularly popular among young lawyers seeking a challenge. He says the abundance of work has created a lawyer shortage that will soon be exacerbated as an older generation nears retirement. That means the new wave of talent will be getting their hands dirty. "The levels of responsibility that more junior lawyers are being afforded represents a wonderful opportunity," says McIntyre. "It's a very good economy, and there's lots of good work to be done."

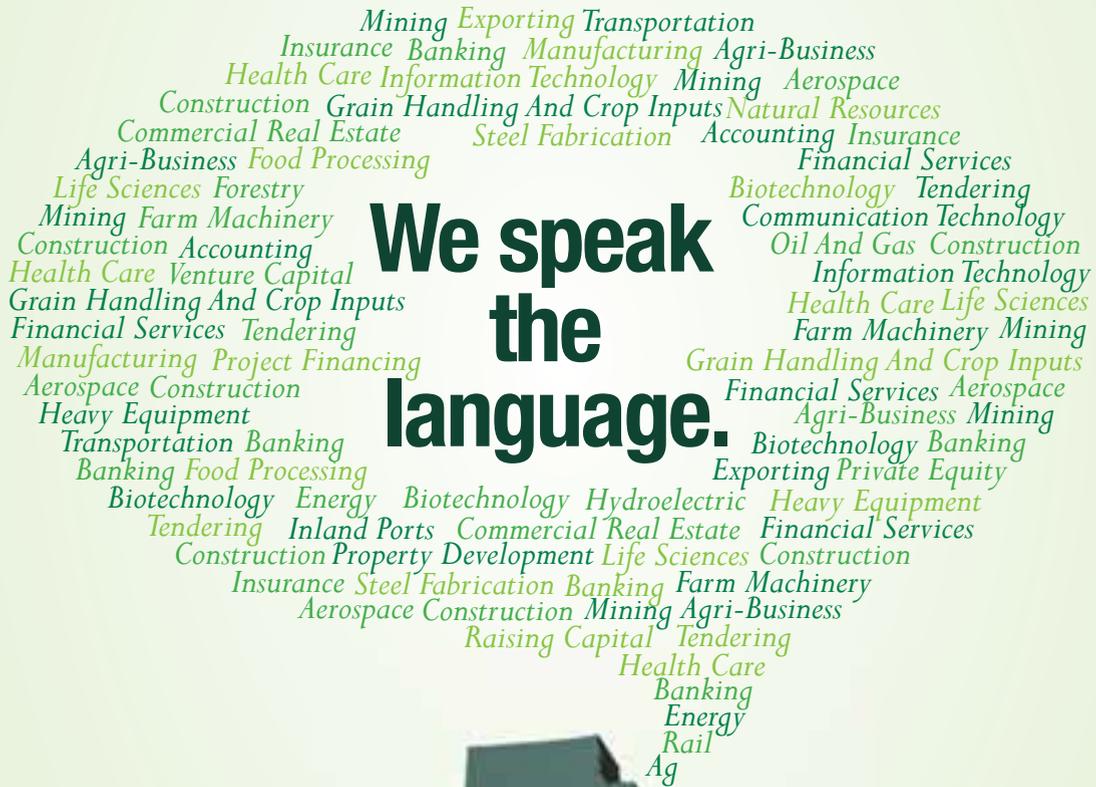
Aikins MacAulay & Thorvaldson LLP executive board chairman Jim Ferguson says regional hubs like Winnipeg, Regina, and Saskatoon also offer a lifestyle that can't be matched in some of the country's larger cities. "There's no question you're going to get greater deal volume and larger transaction sizes in somewhere like Toronto," he says. "But Winnipeg is one of the most affordable Canadian cities. Everything from its size, to the cost of living, to the ease of commuting, makes it attractive, I think."

And according to Pitblado Law managing partner Bruce King, it's not just the talent migrating to the Prairies — the work has followed. One of the firm's U.S.-based multinational clients recently asked it to take charge of a nationwide Canadian legal project, bypassing a national firm in the process. "For a moment, I thought they might have been confused, and forgotten the difference between their Winnipeg and Toronto firms," says King. "They're doing it in Winnipeg because we've developed the relationship, and they realize we can do it with much more economical results."

Read on to see the firms leading the way as the region continues to develop.

HOW WE DID IT

Canadian Lawyer asked lawyers, in-house counsel, and clients from across Canada to vote on Saskatchewan and Manitoba's top full-service, regional firms. They were asked to rank their top five firms in each province from a preliminary list, with a chance to nominate a firm that was not included on the lists. Respondents' rankings were based on firms' regional service coverage, client base, notable mandates, service excellence, and legal expertise. To be considered in the vote, firms were required to have offices primarily in the provinces of Saskatchewan or Manitoba, and offer a wide range of legal services. The final rankings were determined through a points system, in which firms were rewarded on a sliding scale for the number of first- to fifth-place votes received. Firms' 2011 rankings are noted in brackets.



At TDS Law, we not only serve Manitoban clients, we speak their language. Our nationally recognized lawyers help the industries that nurture our province's future. We sit on industry boards and association committees, contribute to trade publications and serve clients in Manitoba's key industries. When you are looking for a diverse team of lawyers who truly understand the needs of Manitobans, you will never need to look far because we are already here.



THOMPSON DORFMAN SWEATMAN LLP

201 Portage Avenue, Suite 2200, Winnipeg, Manitoba, R3B 3L3 • 204.957.1930

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TOP PRAIRIE REGIONAL FIRMS

2013-14
CANADIAN Lawyer

TOP 10
PRAIRIE REGIONAL FIRMS

THOMPSON DORFMAN SWEATMAN LLP TDSLAW.COM

Total lawyers: 75

Offices: Winnipeg, 75; Steinbach, part-time satellite office

Core practice areas: Litigation and dispute resolution, labour and employment law, government and regulatory, corporate-commercial, property and development

Key clients: Toronto-Dominion Bank, Manitoba Hydro, HudBay Minerals Inc., Agrium, The Winnipeg Regional Health Authority, Boyd Group Income Fund

Notable mandates: Acts for Manitoba Housing and Renewal Corp. on its Bridgwater Forest development, scheduled to house 40,000 residents by completion in 2022; counsel for the court-appointed monitor in a number of CCAA proceedings; external counsel to Manitoba Hydro in negotiations with numerous First Nations, including a \$5.6-billion partnership and development agreement for the 695-megawatt Keeyask project; external counsel to HudBay Minerals Inc. as it sought environmental regulatory approvals for its \$700-million Lalor zinc-copper-gold project near Snow Lake, Man.; represented Boyd Group Income Fund in \$20-million purchase of three Florida businesses.

Star alumni: Manitoba Chief Justice Richard Scott; Manitoba Court of Queen's Bench Associate Chief Justice William Burnett; Manitoba

Minister of Family Services and Consumer Affairs Gord Mackintosh; Attorney General Andrew Swan; former Manitoba Progressive Conservative Party leader Hugh McFadyen.

Affiliations: Lex Mundi

The firm: TDS is the continuum of firms dating back to 1887, but it adopted its current moniker in 1973. In 2009, the firm announced the launch of its affiliate, Acumen Corporate Development Inc., which co-ordinates companies' corporate development matters. Last month, TDS announced plans to merge with Portage la Prairie-based Christianson Law and bring its two lawyers on board later this year. The firm's services have also expanded in recent years with the addition of tax litigation and business immigration.

"Prompt and efficient" service, as well as the ability to "find creative alternatives" make TDS the go-to firm of one in-house counsel. "Great local contacts, top professionals," added another corporate counsel based in Toronto.

Slow and steady wins the race, according to CEO and managing partner Don Douglas. He says the firm is growing modestly, but his real focus is on servicing existing clients as well as possible. "It's a stable mature market," he says. "We try and be client centric in our view of the world, which means good service delivered quickly and at a reasonable cost."