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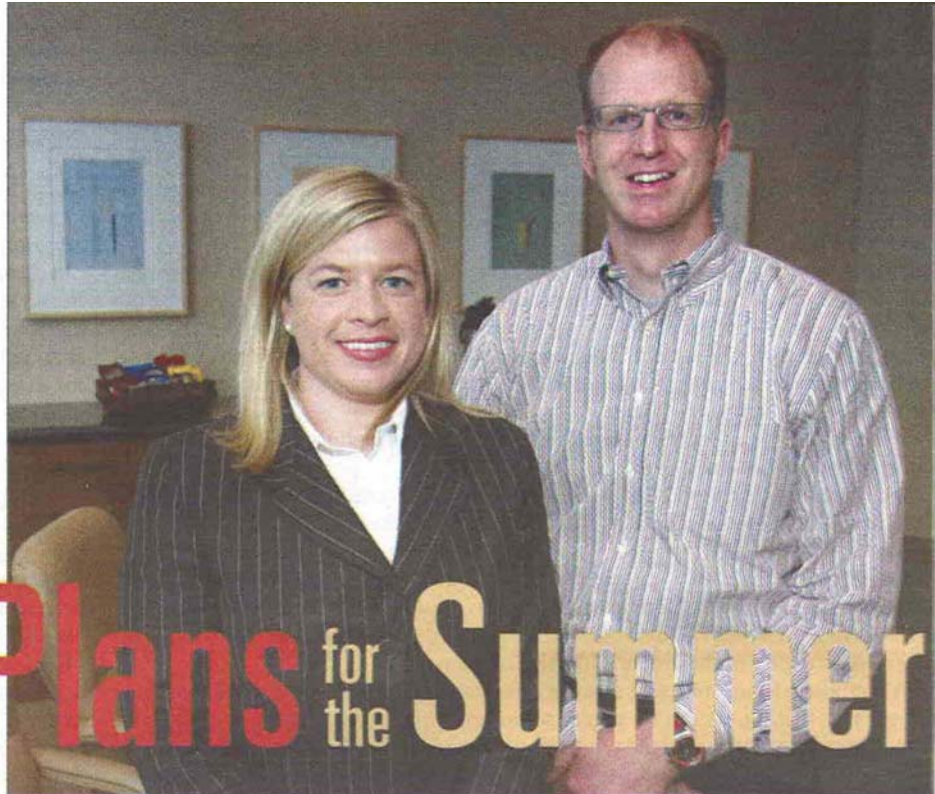
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Law students trade time in the sun for memos, conference calls and a valuable legal experience.



Firm Plans for the Summer

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As many Minnesotans pack up the car and head to the lake this summer, first-, second- and even some third-year law students quietly begin filing into their cubbyholes in law firms throughout the state.

Bringing law students in — usually at the end of their second year — grooming them and, if all goes well, offering them a job at the end of the summer, is a long-standing tra-

dition at larger law firms and one that is accompanied by a certain amount of mythology. Small- and mid-sized firms also recruit students for the summer, but their programs tend to be ad hoc rather than the carefully orchestrated programs employed by big Twin Cities law firms.

While bonding social activities such as cruises, barbecues and the like are an ingrained and important component of these big firm programs, being a summer associate is still no

Kelsey Shuff, director of legal recruiting at Dorsey & Whitney, left, and attorney Jonathan Van Horn oversee the firm's summer associate program of 45 law students. (Photo: Bill Klotz)

Firms want associates who fit into the culture and build relationships

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walk on the beach. The firms also try to give their prospective hires a real taste of law firm life, and expect real work from them.

In fact, whether at a social event or in the office, the summer is one long job interview for these future lawyers, and it can be grueling.

A two-way interview

Most firms have a 12-week program that exposes the summer associates to a variety of work, often within interest areas that have been specified by the student. Many firms expect the summer associates to contribute some pro bono work as well.

"We want to get to know the summer associates and their skills, and we want them to learn about the firm and its culture. It's an interview both ways," said Munir Meghjee, chair of the hiring committee at Robins, Kaplan, Miller & Ciresi. Meghjee said the associates perform "real work" that attorneys actually use in their cases and produce written work product. "We want them to learn how to practice and to write," he said. While the summer associate program is the firm's primary vehicle for hiring, it's not "recruitment by social activities," he said.

At Dorsey & Whitney, a summer associate such as Laura Hammargren, who has completed two years at the University of St. Thomas School of Law, will work on labor and employment, energy regulation and trial practices — as well as a pro bono death penalty case.

Leonard Street and Deinard offers three

types of summer associate programs — a traditional program for second-year law students and two programs for first-year students. One of those programs is for the firm's "minority scholars" from all four local law schools and the other is a two-week program for students from outside Minnesota.

The firm also offers training in professional development such as transactional and litigation skills, business development, law office management and legal writing, said Karl Jensen Thomas, the recruiting manager.

Jennifer Vainik, who will start her third year at the University of Minnesota this fall, is researching a health law issue and working on a pro bono family law case at Leonard Street. She's also had an introduction to marketing and client relationships as well as a comprehensive orientation about the firm.

Practicing people skills

But there is a social component to the summer associate experience because the firms are looking for lawyers who will fit into the office culture and can build good professional relationships. Sometimes the firm also wants to sell the Twin Cities to its out-of-town guests.

"To be a successful lawyer you have to have people skills. That's just as important as academic [talent]," said attorney Travis Anderson, who heads the C.A.R.E.E.R.S. Program at Oppenheimer Wolff & Donnelly. The C.A.R.E.E.R.S. Program is composed of students com-

pleting their second year of law school who receive permanent offers before starting at Oppenheimer.

Even though the students aren't being "recruited" any more, there's still a calendar of social events, said Anderson. "It's a good way for them to meet people."

The social element of the programs is important, even if careers aren't nipped in the bud by drinking red wine out of a white wineglass. Timothy Gelineske at Briggs and Morgan joked that he wouldn't know what "social graces" to look for if he wanted to.

"We look for people who can be sociable in a genuine way — natural, real, interactive and warm," he said. The worst thing a summer associate can do is mistreat a member of the staff, he added.

Briggs offers a variety of social activities from "Karaoke Idol" night to the Guthrie Theater, but Gelineske was quick to add that the firm doesn't run a "summer camp" and has work expectations for its summer associates.

Fredrikson & Byron looks for well-rounded individuals who can conduct themselves in any situation, said Greta Larson, manager of legal recruiting. In addition to helping in the process of finding these people, the social events re-energize the other associates and partners, she said.

The firm offers a variety of events, including a Segway tour through downtown, but "no extreme boondoggles," said Larson.

Dorsey is trying to sell the firm and the city to its summer associates, not evaluate how they act and judge them by it, explained Jonathan A. Van Horn, who oversees a program for 45 summer associates. The social component is significant

— "plus it's fun for the Dorsey people."

All things in moderation

Even a very low-key out-of-office event such as lunch gives a summer associate a good chance to connect, said Hammargren. "I feel more comfortable talking to the lawyers when I know they aren't working."

But the summer associates shouldn't have too much fun. "Everyone's advice to me is to only have one drink," Hammargren said.

Susan Gainen, co-director of the career and professional development center at the University of Minnesota, warned that

alcohol consumption has occasionally been the downfall of summer associates. "It's clear that too much drinking has cost people offers. I could tell you stories but I won't. It's about, 'Would I trust this person alone in a room with a client?'"

If the summer associates are to be evaluated based on their social interaction, then it's up to the law firm to communicate to them what's expected, said Thomas. "The expectation level is not unattainable and we want to help them. We give them the keys to the kingdom. Our role is to coach and support them," she said.

None of the lawyers at firms contacted by Minnesota Lawyer could recall a specific example of a summer associate who had torpedoed his or her career by drunkenness or other social faux pas.

"I've never had a summer associate blow it. If they don't get offers it's because of their work," said Dana Gray, manager of legal personnel at Faegre & Benson. "I've never been in a situation where I've been really embarrassed by a summer associate." 

"I learned this morning that ... a dozen of our summer associates decided among themselves to go out for drinks, and ended up staying out until three in the morning, finally ending up at a strip club. ... This morning they submitted the receipts to the recruiting coordinator and asked if the firm would reimburse them, as an 'informal summer associate gathering.' ... Since this activity was entirely summer associates, they feel like it's the same kind of event the firm usually pays for, and don't think it's an inappropriate request."

— A fictional, but strangely apropos, entry on the Anonymous Lawyer law-firm humor blog



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