

PRAIRIE GOLD

Canadian Lawyer susses out the top 10 regional law firms in Saskatchewan and Manitoba.

By Robert Todd

It's not easy being a full-service regional firm in Saskatchewan and Manitoba these days. When not turning clients away because you're just too busy, you've got to field calls from national firms looking to link up and establish a presence in some of Canada's most lively economic zones. And the firms featured in *Canadian Lawyer's* list of top 10 Prairie law firms are sure to be on the top of anyone's list of targets, whether for legal services or a law firm merger. So you can just imagine how swamped they are.

"The only way we've had to adapt is by stepping up the pace," says Gordon Kuski, chairman of McDougall Gauley LLP, which has offices in Saskatoon and Regina. "We certainly have had significant demands put on our ability to handle what's been demanded of us."

National firms have certainly shown an interest in breaking into the Saskatchewan market, punctuated by Miller Thomson LLP's December 2010 merger with the 24-lawyer firm Balfour Moss LLP, a firm founded in 1895. Kuski says his firm has resisted overtures — both formal and informal — to link up with other large national firms. "We have very good connections with a lot of the

major firms, including the national firms in the major centres," remarks Kuski. "Whether or not becoming a member of one national firm would be attractive remains to be seen."

Glen Peters, managing partner of Fillmore Riley LLP in Winnipeg, notes that Manitoba has been inundated in recent years with mega-projects, such as a new international airport, the Canadian Museum for Human Rights, and a new football stadium. It's been up to lawyers at firms like Fillmore Riley to move those initiatives forward. "In our market there's always been a strong small business base, but the main difference in the last few years is the mega-projects," says Peters.

"Many individuals have been in great demand in the last period of time."

Of course, there will be those who say the booms Saskatchewan and Manitoba are experiencing are sure to turn to bust at some point. Lawyers on the ground level of the upswing would disagree. "We truly do think that the worm has turned — this is a long-term reality," says Don Wilson, Regina managing partner for MacPherson Leslie & Tyerman LLP. "There is a great opportunity for law firms that focus on the Prairies and Western Canada, and the type of legal services that are required there."

Read on to see the firms that are likely to remain front and centre 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 10 firms from a preliminary list, with a chance to nominate a firm that was not included on the list. 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 10th-place votes received.

Taylor McCaffrey LLP (www.tmlawyers.com)

Total lawyers: 63

Office: Winnipeg

Core practice areas: Business law, labour and employment, civil litigation, taxation, and domestic law.

Key clients: The City of Winnipeg, Apotex Fermentation Inc., MTS Allstream Inc., Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce, Palliser Furniture Ltd., and the University of Manitoba.

Notable mandates: The City of Winnipeg in connection with the disposition of its electric utility, the former Winnipeg Hydro, to Manitoba Hydro; Apotex Fermentation Inc. and Cangene Corp., members of the Apotex Group of Companies, on commercial, regulatory, and litigation matters since 1992; the University of Manitoba in collective bargaining negotiations with fac-

ulty; retained by MTS Allstream Inc. to bring an appeal from a \$100-million judgment rendered against it in favour of union members and retirees in relation to its pension plan; acted for the Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce and other lenders in connection with a \$700-million syndicated loan to a Canadian agricultural sector borrower.

Star alumni: Justice Joe Hershfield of the Tax Court of Canada, Justice Nicole Garson of the British Columbia Court of Appeal, former president/CEO/chairman of Investors Group Ltd. Sanford Riley, Canadian Wheat Board general counsel James McLandress, National Leasing Group Inc. vice president and general counsel Jacqueline Lowe.

Affiliations: State Capital Group

The firm: Taylor McCaffrey LLP formed originally in 1979 as a result of the merger of Richardson & Co. — a firm dating back several decades and whose senior partner was J.F. Reeh Taylor — and McCaffrey Akman Carr Starr and Prober, whose senior partner was D'Arcy McCaffrey. In 1980, it merged with Brazzell & Co., and in 1991 linked up with Newman MacLean to form Taylor McCaffrey LLP. Since the early 1990s, the firm has expanded through internal growth and the addition of individual practitioners.

One respondent said Taylor McCaffrey fits into the upper echelon of Manitoba's full service firms for its "commitment to excellence," and applauded its lawyers for being "leading practitioners in their fields."

Thanks for noticing.

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