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When the going gets tough, the tough become creative

Recent law school grads find innovation and patience are valuable in today's challenging job market

BY MELODY FINNEMORE
Special for the DJC

For a brief honeymoon period after graduating from law school in May 2009, Levi Johnston could almost ignore the dismal prospects he and his classmates would face upon entering the job market. After all, they had to pass the bar exam first.

Once the exam results came out in October, however, it was time to face reality and start job hunting. "It was really a rough time. Everyone was kind of depressed and panicky," said Johnston, who graduated from Lewis & Clark College's Northwestern School of Law.

Like most other recent law school grads, Johnston didn't receive a job offer from a large firm, which traditionally has represented the coveted first step in a lifelong career for many young attorneys.

Instead, Johnston pieced together a practice in which he spends about half of his time providing transactional corporate legal services for small businesses such as startups and entrepreneurs. The other half of his professional life involves doing contract litigation work for Portland law firm Whipple & Duyck.

From Johnston's perspective, he's got the best of both worlds. His transactional practice capitalizes on the work he did with Lewis & Clark's Small Business Legal Clinic, which provides transactional legal advice to new and emerging businesses owned by women, minorities and recent immigrants. Johnston's contract work allows him to learn new skills from a pair of seasoned mentors.

"It gives me the litigation experience I didn't get in law school," he said. "It's a

great way to get experience, learn from two talented attorneys and make some money. I absolutely love it."

Johnston is among a growing body of young attorneys who are finding innovative ways to join the recessionary job market and gain professional experience by providing legal services as independent contractors, doing part-time work, clerking and networking through less traditional means than their older counterparts.

Tamara Gledhill, chair-elect of the Oregon New Lawyers Division, said many young attorneys have taken positions as legal assistants or paralegals to gain experience. Others have volunteered to provide pro bono services for Legal Aid of Oregon, Catholic Charities and other nonprofit organizations.

While legal careers may look different now than in years past, and while it took a bit longer to find paid work, the bulk of Lewis & Clark's class of 2009 is employed, said Libby Davis, associate dean for career services and alumni relations for Lewis & Clark's law school.

"What they are finding is that, yes, it's difficult and it's challenging, but there are options out there," she said.

Few of them joined large firms. Rather, some established their own practices while others, like Johnston, patched together a variety of options that allows them to make a living.

"Now, they may not be employed in what they want to do forever and they may not be employed full time, but I have hardly anyone who is unemployed," Davis said. "The 2009 group was scrappy and willing to do whatever it took to build connections

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Dan Carter/DJC

Levi Johnston, who graduated from Lewis & Clark College's Northwestern School of Law in May 2009, has cobbled together a practice where he spends about half of his time providing transactional corporate legal services for small businesses – and the other half doing contract litigation work for a Portland law firm.

Concordia University law school settles into Boise home

Law school breaks ground on expansion, renovation of 17,000-square-foot building in city's downtown area

BY JENNIFER GONZALEZ
Dolan Media Newswires

BOISE, Idaho – Idaho's newest law school is officially calling Boise home. Dozens of people helped Concordia University's School of Law celebrate its groundbreaking June 22, at its property at Fifth and Front streets in downtown Boise.

"I am thrilled that Concordia has chosen to make Boise its new home," Boise Mayor Dave Bieter said. "The law school will provide

"The law school will provide a needed educational opportunity for the entire valley and will also make this part of town more vibrant as the campus fills with faculty, staff, and new students."

– DAVE BIETER
Boise mayor

a needed educational opportunity for the entire valley and will also make this part of town more vibrant as the campus fills with faculty, staff, and new students."

A major expansion and renovation

are slated for the existing 17,000-square-foot building that will include a three-story, 33,000-square-foot addition. A library, classrooms, offices and other amenities will complete the project.

Its central location is expected to be a key benefit for both students and faculty.

"The location is very advantageous, especially because we are near the statehouse, Ada County Courthouse, state offices, and nonprofit agencies," said Cathy Silak, dean of the law school and a former Idaho Supreme Court justice.

"Concordia is looking forward to providing the same transformative leadership in this community that it is known for across the United States," she said.

University President Chuck

Schlimpert said the school will have a positive impact throughout the city and state.

"Concordia is committed to Boise and Idaho for the long term by helping grow its future leaders, who will give back through community service," he said.

Pending accreditation by the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities, the school is anticipated to be open in fall 2011.

Concordia University is a private, Lutheran, liberal arts school founded in 1905 and located in Portland, Ore.

Employment: Many recent grads take part-time jobs to cover living expenses and pay off debt

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and get experience.”

According to the American Bar Association, employment rates for new law grads hit 91.9 percent in 2007, near a 20-year peak. That fell to 89.9 percent in 2008 and 88.3 percent in 2009.

James Leipold, executive director of the National Association for Law Placement Inc., said that while the 2009 employment figure may appear to be fairly strong, about 25 percent of those jobs are temporary and encompass public interest work, judicial clerkships and academic, post-graduate positions at law schools.

More recent grads are working part time than ever before, Leipold added. And, 22 percent of the grads NALP surveyed reported that they were still job hunting even though they were employed. That suggests that many young lawyers are taking jobs to cover living expenses and begin paying off their debt from law school rather than finding work that is personally satisfying, he said.

The NALP survey also found that fewer working graduates are even practicing law (70.8 percent



“It’s a total blow to the ego, and it’s really difficult to go through it. Then things just started to pick up for me in February, and I feel a thousand times better about it now than I did six months ago.”

— LEVI JOHNSTON
Recent law school graduate

in 2009 versus 74.7 percent in 2008). Of those, many have established their own practices. Sole practitioners make up 2.9 percent of the jobs reported this year, compared to 1.9 percent last year, according to the NALP.

Johnston said his efforts to build a solo practice have been strengthened through connections he established during law school. He said Maggie Finnerty, executive director of Lewis & Clark’s Small Business Legal Clinic, has been a strong mentor and a great source of contacts, connecting Johnston with other attorneys

who have established a similar, non-traditional career path.

Johnston said that while the job market seems to be picking up – he has seen more firms posting job openings of late – he empathizes with young attorneys who are struggling to gain their professional footing.

“It’s a total blow to the ego, and it’s really difficult to go through it,” he said, noting he felt pretty depressed about his prospects in January. “Then things just started to pick up for me in February, and I feel a thousand times better about it now than I did six months ago.”

Mentorship resources

With fewer large law firms hiring, young attorneys have had to look for professional mentors elsewhere. Fortunately, there are several programs available for just that purpose. Here are a few:

The Multnomah Bar Association’s Young Lawyer Section oversees a Professional Development and Education Committee, which provides mentorship for young lawyers on issues such as contract work, client development, financial planning and setting up a practice.

The Oregon State Bar’s Lawyer to Lawyer Program provides free assistance to lawyers who want to learn about a new practice area. They are matched with three professionals who specialize in that particular field and have offered to provide advice. The Bar’s Take Me to Lunch Program allows attorneys to carry that burgeoning relationship one step further by inviting a potential advisor out to lunch.

The Bar’s Oregon New Lawyers Division offers several mentorship opportunities. In addition, the Bar’s Affirmative Action Program pairs young minority lawyers with established attorneys who can provide not only professional advice but guidance on issue that impact women and people of color.

Mentorship also is available through the Oregon Minority Lawyers Association, the Oregon Trial Lawyers Association, Oregon Women Lawyers and the American Inns of Court, a nationwide program made up of judges, attorneys, law professors and law students. Through the Owen Panner American Inn of Court in Portland, young attorneys can participate in programs that foster ethics, skills and professionalism among Oregon’s legal professionals. — Melody Finnemore

UP & coming LAWYERS 2010

Wednesday, November 10, 2010
4:30 - 7:30 pm at University Club of Portland
1225 SW Sixth Ave, Portland, OR

The Daily Journal of Commerce proudly introduces another award-winning event. The Up & Coming Lawyers Awards recognizes attorneys who have demonstrated commitment to the legal profession early in their careers, are active in professional organizations, give back to their community, and are leaders in their field.

Nomination Deadline
September 10, 2010

For additional event information and nomination forms, visit:
www.djcoregon.com/events or contact
Cris Schulz: 503.802.7212 cris.schulz@djcoregon.com

Do you know anyone who meets the following criteria:

- Open to all government, in-house, sole practitioners, attorneys with firms and judicial law clerks
- Admitted to the Oregon State Bar within the past 10 years (2000-2010)
- Practice in the state of Oregon
- Be active in one or more professional organizations
 - Demonstrate a commitment to the community through extracurricular activities or pro bono work
 - Demonstrate leadership and above average achievements in day-to-day legal assignments

