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Koley Jessen capitalizes on innovative, multi-disciplinary approach to growth

by Richard D. Brown

Omaha-based Koley Jessen, a multi-disciplinary law firm that over the past five years has seen its attorney ranks grow by 22 percent, credits its growth over the past 30 years to pursuing an entrepreneurial approach to the practice of law. The 132-employee firm — with 73 attorneys — recently served its 20,000th client.

That client was a small local business that needed some corporate legal needs addressed.

“What we preach is that of what our founders Jim Koley and Paul Jessen did during their lifetimes,” said President Michael M. Hupp. “You have to make the client’s problem your problem.”

Hupp, a 1984 juris doctorate graduate of University of Nebraska-Lincoln and 30-plus year veteran of the legal profession, said the entrepreneurial atmosphere stresses making the firm’s 48,000 square feet on three floors of One Pacific Place, 1125 South 103rd St., a team atmosphere.

Executive Vice President Alexander J. Wolf, a 2006 juris doctorate graduate of the University of Minnesota, said the entrepreneurial thrust involves building on already strong competencies.

“We actually try to get better every day and that is achieved by being passionate about helping our clients see around the corner,” Wolf said.

Hupp and Wolf said the entrepreneurial approach has necessitated adding talent to the legal team to tackle the needs of clients in rapidly growing areas such as tax, data privacy, cyber security, immigration and health care law. For example, Joseph Huigens, has joined the Koley Jessen health care law practice after experiences in working for a multinational retailer, an international law firm, a defense company and service as a legal intern in the criminal division of the U.S. Attorney’s office.

Health care clients of Koley Jessen include regional health care providers, surgery centers and national and international health care industry leaders needing counsel on complex business and regulatory compliance matters.

Law firms today are putting more emphasis on responsive, practical and especially, proactive advice.

“We’ve assembled a team with strong business acumen that can make economic value,” Hupp said.

Koley Jessen has had consistent growth in



From left, Shareholder Eric Oxley, Executive VP and Shareholder Alexander Wolf, President and Shareholder Michael Hupp and Shareholder Margaret Hershiser ... Making key hires to boost firm in growing areas of practice.

demand for the talents of its 11-attorney and three para-professional estate/business succession planning group. The Omaha firm is one of only three practices recognized as a Band 1 provider in Chambers and Partners’ High Net Worth Guide among Nebraska firms, according to the industry publication Private Wealth Law.

Wolf said lawyers are viewing the recent tax legislation signed into law by President Trump as having “large impact on our area.”

“We’re releasing weekly tax alerts to our clients as part of our hands-on look at the law,” Hupp said.

Bryan Sloan, who joined Koley Jessen three years ago as chair of the firm’s tax practice group, was a former managing partner of the Omaha office of Deloitte and prior to that spent eight years in the Washington, D.C. office of the Wilmer Cutler Pickering Hale and Dorr law firm.

Colleen Medill, of-counsel at Koley Jessen, is a law professor at University of Nebraska College of Law. She has been appointed to serve a three-year term on the U.S. Secretary of Labor’s Advisory Council on Employee Welfare and Pension Benefit Plans.

Koley Jessen is building an online vault system that will enable clients to submit accounting,

legal, financial and insurance documents, among others, that can be accessed by other professionals working on putting family and business information together.

“We’re testing it at present with our existing clients and we hope to have it fully implemented later this year,” Hupp said.

He said the deep experience of the Koley Jessen team has enabled it to develop long-term relationships with clients that last for decades. For example, he cites a local contractor who started with the firm in 1988 with equity of \$100,000 and \$7 million in revenues that has reached \$100 million and is now receiving counsel regarding a second change of ownership of the business.

Hupp said the client has increased his use of Koley Jessen services to include estate planning, litigation — among several others.

Eric B. Oxley, a juris doctorate holder from The Catholic University of America Columbus School of Law, counsels corporate and private equity clients in domestic and international mergers, acquisitions and divestitures, as well as corporate and general business matters.

A heavy volume of his practice has been deals in the industrial sector. He has executed more than 100 domestic and cross-border merger and acquisition transactions.

Recently, Koley Jessen was chosen from a field of 650 participating firms nationally in New York City when it received Law Firm of the Year recognition from M&A Advisor, an industry group. The Omaha firm was credited with having closed more than 350 deals across 40 states and nine countries over the past five years.

Omaha native Margaret C. Hershiser, who joined the firm in 1991 after her graduation for

Creighton Law School, is an expert in education law.

“It’s an area of steady growth and it is recession proof,” she said.

Clients include Bellevue University plus two other schools in Omaha.

Hershiser is routinely involved in student discipline proceedings, teacher disciplinary actions and terminations. She frequently advises education clients on contract matters, compliance with open meeting laws, Title IX compliance and other relevant state and federal laws impacting public education.

Other areas she handles include employment and labor, executive compensation and litigation. The Koley Jessen litigation group includes 23 attorneys dedicated to litigation. About 80 percent of the clients are based in Nebraska or Iowa, although the firm has handled disputes across 43 states.

While Koley Jessen has specialized in business succession planning for clients over the past three decades, a major leadership decision was made in December with the election of Wolf to executive vice president. His role will be to work hand-in-hand with Hupp on strategic firm direction, community involvement and outreach.

Hupp said that he will work closely with Wolf, who is 37, on Koley Jessen’s six-member executive committee over the next two year’s to put the firm’s “extremely progressive” succession plan in place. The idea is that Koley Jessen wants to assure each of its clients that the firm’s veteran members will integrate younger colleagues on the needs and progression of each account in an orderly process over a number of years.

“We want to assure that their needs are and will be covered with the objectives being continuity and retention,” Hupp said. “We are excited about being ahead of the curve on this as we address leadership and client succession planning.”

An important part of Koley Jessen’s strategic plan calls for making physical plant decisions based on future needs. The firm’s space was renovated in 2016.

Wolf said much of the space has been completely overhauled as technology continues to play an increasingly important role in the company’s ability to service clients, train lawyers and ability to attract additional legal talent as growth continues.

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