

Vorys, Sater, Seymour and Pease links its success to diversity

BY TRACY BEAN

Diversity helps to drive success at Vorys, Sater, Seymour and Pease LLP. Since its founding in 1909, Vorys has grown into one of the largest law firms in the country. Its 400 attorneys provide business and legal counsel from six offices in Ohio, Virginia and Washington, D. C.

Vorys was among the first law firms in Ohio to hire women and African American attorneys, and it has continually been a leader in recruiting and promoting lawyers of all backgrounds.

Anthony O'Malley, managing partner of the Vorys Cleveland office, has been with the firm since 1989. He said Vorys has created an atmosphere which allows people to thrive by lending their different talents, perspectives, backgrounds and experiences to serve its clients.

"We serve a lot of public and private customers, and as you look around and read in the newspapers, diversity is all around us, so we need to reflect the clients we serve. Our clients are increasingly holding us accountable to be diverse and to reflect the society we live in. We believe that through our commitment to diversity, we serve our communities better. Embracing diversity is the right thing to do, from a social perspective and certainly from a business perspective," O'Malley said. "There's fierce competition for talented, diverse individuals, but Vorys has distinguished itself with its culture of inclusion."



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This year, Vorys created a seat on the management committee for the chairman of the diversity committee, further embracing diversity as one of the firm's core values. The goal of the diversity committee is to bring partners and associates together to develop and implement strategies for attracting, retaining and promoting a diverse team of professionals and staff and to regularly evaluate the effectiveness of those strategies.

Fred Ransier, a partner in Vorys'

Columbus office and a member of the bankruptcy practice and the government affairs and lobbying group, chairs the diversity committee. He and his wife Kathleen joined the firm seven years ago after owning a private practice for more than 26 years. The couple joined Vorys not only to expand their legal resources but also to expand upon their own base of talent and to continue to make contributions to the community.

"The diversity committee works with the firm's leadership to encourage open dialogue on diversity issues and to maintain an environment in which diversity of all types can flourish," Ransier explained. When the diversity committee was formed about five years ago, Vorys initially audited members of the law firm to gauge their attitudes about diversity. Although the firm was pleased with the survey results, it still realized it still had challenges. Since then, Vorys has continually addressed diversity issues and embraced diversity from the top down, and by doing so, it has moved the firm and the profession to be more diverse. Vorys is a leader in diversity among law firms across Ohio and a demonstrated leader

in recruiting diverse talent into the legal profession.

Vorys makes a special effort to identify and interview diverse candidates at all law schools in order to attract the best and brightest new talent. In addition to participating in minority jobs fairs, Vorys lawyers regularly visit campuses to build relationships with student associations and meet with law students to discuss legal careers.

Vorys established the George Corey

Scholarship program, in memory of partner George Corey, whose immense legal talent, professionalism and warmth left an indelible mark on the Ohio legal community. The program awards up to three scholarships each year to first-year minority law students. The firm also offers the nationally recognized Minority Clerkship Program sponsored by the Columbus Bar Association.

As a firm, Vorys' culture is to encourage daily, one-on-one contact between senior lawyers and associates to foster a sense of inclusion and involvement. To that end, the firm has launched several internal and external programs to keep everyone involved in the firm's success:

- Mentoring program — This pairs every associate with a partner mentor who meet formally and informally to develop a personalized approach to the associate's training, development and evaluation.

- Training and continuing legal education — Associates work directly with partners to receive training through hands-on experience and feedback on their work product.

- Associate relations committee — This committee is comprised of partners and associates to provide a forum for addressing associate issues and fostering open communications and strong relationships between associates and partners.

- Bar associations and community groups — Vorys provides substantial financial support to bar associations and other groups focused on women, minority and lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender issues. Vorys lawyers also actively participate and assume leadership roles in these organizations.

While client service is first, Vorys understands the importance of meeting the individual needs of employees. The firm strives to support its lawyers in balancing the demands of their jobs with their outside interests and responsibilities.



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ties. The firm offers alternative work schedules, provides family friendly employment benefits, including parental leave, a pre-tax child care benefit and domestic partner benefits, including health insurance and long-term care.

"We have made a very conscientious effort to help our employees achieve a happy home life and to balance their professional responsibilities while still serving our clients," O'Malley explained. "We believe these kinds of efforts also help create a work environment that allows us to retain and attract diverse talent more effectively."

Vorys also has a long tradition of community involvement and support. At each

of its offices, lawyers, paralegals and staff members are involved in cultural organizations, charitable groups and other programs that seek to improve the quality of life in those communities.

"We believe that to whom much is given much is expected. We have been a United Way pacesetter company for the last several years. In addition, our attorneys are free to identify community or charitable organizations they wish to support," O'Malley said.

In Cleveland, Vorys has supported the Susan Koman Race for the Cure, Alzheimer's Association, Beechbrook, Providence House, Cleveland Foodbank, Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation and Toys for Tots. In 2006, Vorys received the Corporate Caring Award from *Business First*, a central Ohio business daily. Four years ago, Vorys was one of the founding members of the Buildable Home Program in conjunction with Habitat for Humanity. Each year, Vorys joins other law firms in building a home for a needy family. The law firms sponsor the home, and staff members help with the construction.

Although Vorys has a long and successful record that includes the founding of Wendy's Restaurants and several small start-up businesses that remain major employers in the state, O'Malley said the firm is still focused on serving all client needs — from small companies to large conglomerates.

"Our firm is proud to represent thousand of clients, ranging from start-up businesses to *Fortune* 500 corporations to non-profit organizations and governmental entities. Vorys is also a law firm that is committed to diversity, teamwork, professional development and community involvement. Service is an important part of our history," he said. **K**