

CORPORATE RELOCATION

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To Sell West Virginia Is to Sell a Way of Life

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When selling West Virginia to prospective out-of-state lawyers, many law firm recruiters say they are marketing a lifestyle.

Ned Rugeley, member and recruiting chairman at **Spilman Thomas & Battle's** Charleston office, said the law firm targets nine law schools in four states.

"I tell them that they can have a sophisticated practice of law in a place that's easy to live," Rugeley said. "I tell them about the outdoor activities and that it's a good place to settle down and start a family. I get the message across that there's a life outside of the office in Charleston. You're not stuck in a commute. You can come home to have dinner and come back to the office in the evening if you're on a trial."

John F. Hussell IV, a partner in **Dinsmore & Shohl's** Charleston office, said his firm also focuses on the quality of life.

Hussell mentioned the lack of commute and the abundance of outdoor activities in the state.

"It's one of the most gorgeous states east of the Mississippi," he said. "I tell prospective attorneys that it's a great state to be outdoors. You can be at the New River Gorge in an hour and **Canaan Valley** or **Snowshoe** in about two to three hours. A lot of states don't have that opportunity for leisure activities."

So how do these law firms help out-of-state lawyers adjust to the West Virginia way of life?

Rugeley said it's all about getting used to the area. In the firm's summer program, potential attorneys have the chance to do this.

"For those folks, they spend a summer with us and when they come in, we help them find an apartment and get oriented into the area by getting them a gym membership and things like that to get them acclimated in the summer experience so they have a familiarity when they come back."

Rugeley said other attorneys



also will try to make them feel as much at home as possible by taking them out and showing them restaurants and other activities.

"If I can get someone here in the summer, they can see the law firm, get to know the city and area and experience things such as the concerts on the levy," Rugeley said. "It's much easier to come back for full-time employment once they've acclimated to the area."

Hussell said lawyers help these new associates as much as possible, which is why it's important to have a helpful team.

"You may have an associate in the second or third year who lived in a certain apartment when they first got to Charleston. They will help new associates based on their knowledge of the area and allow them to get to know the community."

Getting involved in the community is another way to settle into the area. Hussell said that's

one of the facets the firm promotes about West Virginia.

"It's beyond just a place to live," Hussell said. "One of the most important things is belonging and getting invested in the community ... whether that's doing activities at the **Clay Center**, volunteering with the symphony orchestra or playing softball or basketball at the **YMCA**."

Why is it important for firms to hire out-of-state employees as well as the locals?

"I think there are a couple of great benefits," Rugeley explained. "I know people have preconceived notions of West Virginia. People who come here early on in their careers and develop and mature here have a tendency to stay."

Rugeley said it also promotes diversity of thought.

"I really like to broaden our range of folks so we get that diversity of thought," Rugeley said. "You turn out a better

product that way."

When recruiting from different states, Rugeley and Hussell said it's important to look for areas similar to West Virginia. Rugeley said he generally targets law schools in contiguous states such as Ohio, Kentucky and Virginia.

"You probably don't want to grab someone 24-years-old, used to living in Manhattan, unless they express that great desire to get out of that lifestyle. Look for people in similar-sized cities or areas who would be comfortable living in an area this size."

Both Rugeley and Hussell also tell employers to not be afraid to sell West Virginia's benefits.

"In West Virginia — and this isn't unique to just practice of law, it's true of whatever occupation — we need to be proud of who we are," Hussell said. "We often have the tendency to be our own worst enemy. We need to do a better job of being our best advocate."