

BY JEFF ZBAR

**T**he U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics forecasts jobs for attorneys will grow 10 percent between 2010 and 2020, hitting some 801,000 in less than a decade.

Leaders at local law firm Kelley Kronenberg are more bullish than federal analysts. The 85-lawyer firm has doubled its size in the last two-plus years – and may double again in the next three, Managing Partner Michael Fichtel said.

The Fort Lauderdale office added a floor to accommodate new attorneys, and plans are under way to relocate the Miami and West Palm Beach offices to match growth, he said.

Across South Florida, law firms seemingly have emerged from the recession heartened by renewed business and bullish on tomorrow. Several contacted report strong current hiring – and strong prospects for the foreseeable future.

Hiring stems from new business, and most firms are reporting several streams of revenue growth. At Kelley Kronenberg, for example, growth has been organic – clients steering more new work to the firm. It's also come with the hiring of "lateral" attorneys – established practitioners who bring their networks of existing clients and prospects.

The firm has been opening new areas of practice – especially those it might have "dabbled" in previously, Fichtel said. For example, commercial litigation had its first hire about four years ago. Today, it has nine lawyers. Foreclosure litigation defense of financial institutions has six lawyers.

It's also expanded in consumer markets. Family law will trend upward as the economy continues to improve, Fichtel said.

"People were holding off for a variety of reasons: their 401(k) was down, housing val-



ues dropped, they didn't want to spend on divorce," he said. "People tend to spend money on the lawyers when they have the money to spend."



Perry

Gunster in West Palm Beach is eyeing the real estate recovery to fuel its growth, CEO/Managing Shareholder Bill Perry said. The velocity of transactions in 2012 outpaced previous years. Inventory of new and existing homes is

# LAW & ACCOUNTING

## RETURN FROM RECESSION

*As economy and optimism improve, law firms ramp up hiring*

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dropping. Prices are rising. Bankers are making loans, and developers breaking ground.

"The largest drag on the Florida economy seems to be turning around," he said. "And if it does, I think it will turn quickly. Developers, for the first time in a long time, are willing to have the conversation."

That's not to say Gunster was flat during the recession. The firm added attorneys in new markets, including Tallahassee, Jacksonville and Tampa. It opened an Orlando office in February and now has 170 attorneys statewide.

The firm is pursuing maritime law to capitalize on the growth of shipping, railroad, transportation, logistics and associated real estate. At the same time, it has had a "slight pivot" into transactional practice, governmental affairs, real estate and land use, and corporate and tax – "the areas of the legal practice that are driven by positive uptick in the economy," Perry said.

### A SURGE IN THE RANKS

In 32 years in practice – including 25 in management – Ron Kammer has never seen a deeper or longer recession. Yet, if he need-



Kammer

ed any metric for the economy's resurgence, it could be the growing ranks – and office needs – at law firm Hinshaw & Culbertson.

The nationwide 500-attorney firm has 93 attorneys statewide, at offices in Coral Gables, Fort Lauderdale, Tampa and Jacksonville. It moved to Coral Ga-

bles about a year ago and has already filled its offices there and recently took additional space, said Kammer, partner-in-charge of that office. The office may add three more associates there this year.

Growth has come mostly in its business practice group; real estate and corporate law ramped up over the past two years, and Kammer is eyeing labor and employment for a new hire, he said. The firm promoted a senior associate to the bankruptcy practice, and moved one into commercial litigation. It is in "fairly serious discussions" with prospective lateral partners in commercial and real estate litigation who will bring with them existing client business.

"As the economy is improving, our practices are getting more active," he said.

Hiring benefits the firm and new attorneys alike, he said. Hinshaw & Culbertson can provide its new attorneys a "national platform" for those who are a good fit with its existing culture. An effective hire delivers expertise, as well as personality.

"Some firms don't emphasize culture enough when bringing laterals on board. They focus on what a person can bring to the bottom line, as opposed to the practice of law," Kammer said. This includes a focus on diversity. "It's very important to clients that their counsel be representative of their communities. We have taken that into account."