

LAWYERS JOURNAL

ACBA Legal Employment Services successfully places first attorney

By Brian Knavish

Late last year, the management team at NutriMost Doctors LLC decided it was time to hire an attorney for a newly created general counsel position. NutriMost – a rapidly growing wellness and weight-loss company – did what many do when seeking legal expertise: they turned to their local bar association.

Working with the ACBA's Legal Employment Services, NutriMost ultimately hired Chad Wissinger to fill the role. Landing the job was significant for Wissinger and NutriMost for obvious reasons, but it also was significant for the ACBA as Wissinger's hiring was the first successful attorney placement for the new service.

ACBA Legal Employment Services serves the Pittsburgh-area legal community by matching qualified candidates with open positions throughout the region and by providing confidential career consultation to jobseekers.

The bar association launched the service last spring, and much of the early efforts involved setting up the structure, spreading the word and recruiting candidates. During the time since its launch, the service successfully placed seven legal professionals (legal secretaries and firm administrators), but Wissinger marks the first attorney placement.

Steve McGaughey, director of finance at NutriMost who oversaw the hiring process, raved about the service.

"We were looking for an attorney and going to go through a placement agency, then someone brought up, 'could we reach out to the bar association to see if they know of anyone looking for a job or have a service that could help us find the right attorney?' said McGaughey. "We anticipated that, as a professional trade organization, the bar association would have a service like this."

Sure enough, the ACBA did. McGaughey was connected to Stephanie Zagrocki, director of Legal Employment Services at the ACBA.

Zagrocki then explained how the placement process works: Companies and firms can hire the ACBA to advertise the position, scour resumes, interview applicants and make recommendations for hire. The fee varies, depending on whether the company is looking to hire an attorney, paralegal, legal secretary or firm administrator (there's no fee for jobseekers to use the service).

"I was surprised because the rate was way more competitive than I anticipated," he said. "We were going to use a placement agency, but the bar association was really, significantly cheaper than any placement agency."



PHOTO BY LILLIAN DEDOMENIC

Chad Wissinger is busy at work in his new office. Through its Legal Employment Services, the ACBA placed Wissinger with NutriMost Doctors LLC.

He talked to Zagrocki and explained the specific experience and qualifications he was looking for in an attorney. The position was posted, and she reviewed the candidates who applied, as well as those who had independently come to the ACBA seeking job openings. She interviewed those applicants who she felt might be a fit, then sent the four most qualified candidates to NutriMost for interviews.

"There were some really strong candidates," McGaughey said.

The company narrowed the search to two finalists and ultimately selected Wissinger.

"It's been a great hire," he added. "It's great to have Chad aboard."

Wissinger agrees.

"The people are great, and the job is a good fit for me," he said. "It's similar to a job I had before, but it's in a new topic area, which is really interesting."

The process was just as seamless for Wissinger, who started the new position Nov. 15.

"I saw the posting in October. I applied, and Stephanie contacted me very quickly, within a day or two," he said. "I interviewed with Stephanie, then had two rounds with the company. From the time I first applied until I got the offer, it was less than two weeks."

Zagrocki, herself, is an attorney who has worked in both corporate and law firm settings, so she has a strong sense

of what a particular employer is seeking in a would-be employee.

“We work with organizations of all sizes. Law firms, companies, nonprofit organizations, you name it,” she said. “This particular situation was significant because it was the first attorney we’ve successfully placed, but we can help organizations find that ideal paralegal, firm administrator or legal secretary as well. We’ve only been around for a matter of months, and already have a strong track record for filling those types of positions.”

David Blaner, executive director of the ACBA, noted that the Wissinger placement is significant because it is the service’s first lawyer hire, but he stressed that it won’t be the last.

“It was the first of what we expect to be many attorney placements,” Blaner said. “For years, attorneys turned to the bar association for job-seeking advice, to see if we knew of any openings and for help landing positions. Similarly, for years firms have come to me asking if I knew of any qualified candidates for a particular position. We always worked to accommodate these requests and help our members, so we finally decided to formalize this into a program dedicated to this service.” ■