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Lundy to lead Meritas

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With the rise of 1,000-lawyer megafirms like **Piper Rudnick** and **Wilmer Cutler Pickering Hale and Dorr**, attorneys in midsize firms might find themselves wondering how to stay competitive. Maybe they're not keen on opening offices in London or Paris — or maybe they're simply staunch independents who don't wish to be swallowed up by bigger fish.

For Baltimore-based **Tydings & Rosenberg**, the solution is membership in **Meritas**, an international alliance of nearly 200 independent law firms.

"For a client, we offer local expertise, competence and service in many more locations than the so-called megafirms can ever hope to," says Tydings partner A. Lee Lundy Jr., who was chosen late last month to take over as chairman of Meritas' board of directors in April. "They may have 2,000 lawyers in perhaps 20 places; we have 5,000 lawyers in perhaps 200 places."

Maggie T. Watkins, president and CEO of Minneapolis-based Meritas, says the organization gives member firms a chance to leverage their resources.

"It gives them the opportunity to stay independent; they



MAXIMILIAN FRANZ

Tydings & Rosenberg partner A. Lee Lundy Jr. was chosen last month as the next chairman of the board of Meritas, an international alliance of nearly 200 independent law firms.

like the environment they're in," Watkins said. "It's a win-win for those firms."

Tydings has been a member of Meritas and its predecessor, Commercial Law Affiliates, since 1990, and Lundy has

served on Meritas' board for the last three years, the firm said.

As chairman for a two-year term, Lundy says he will spend several hundred hours a year in carrying out his responsibili-

ties, which include making recommendations on policy and representing Meritas in different venues around the world.

While admitting that "there's going to be a lot more juggle," Lundy sees only positives for Tydings & Rosenberg.

"The firm, through me, will have exposure to inside counsel [and] potential clients as well as other lawyers outside this area," he said. "We anticipate that it would raise the consciousness of others about using our firm in the future for their work in the mid-Atlantic area."

Lundy, who joined Tydings in 1989, is a partner in the firm's Business, Corporate and Tax Department. He was chosen to chair the Meritas board because of his 10-year experience with a multinational New York firm and his 11-year experience as general counsel for the Camden, N.J.-based **Campbell Soup Co.**, Watkins said.

"He's a top-notch attorney with a wide range of experience," she said. "That's going to be very helpful to all of us."

According to the *martindale.com* Web site, there are more than 100 law firm associations and affiliations worldwide.

But Meritas stands out, Lundy claims, because of its

stringent standards. With a few exceptions, Meritas chooses only one firm in a particular market. Before making that choice, the organization looks at the entire range of firms in the area and eliminates any affiliated with megafirms; then it asks around for recommendations and conducts interviews.

"We look for full service firms, usually with one office, so our member firms [won't be] competitors," Watkins said. Tydings is Meritas' only member firm in Maryland.

"It's much like interviewing for a job; we take them through the mill," Lundy

said. "The membership committee makes a recommendation to the board at large and they are accepted or not."

Staying in is another matter. Member firms are evaluated quarterly by other member firms referring matters to them; they are also evaluated by clients. The ratings are posted on the Meritas Web site.

Firms are held to a strict set of service requirements, which include returning client calls, e-mails and faxes within 24 hours; providing clients with alternative dispute resolution options when appropriate; and complying with a code

of ethics that is allegedly tougher in some respects than the state Rules of Professional Conduct.

If there is a pattern of complaints, a member firm is asked to resign or may be expelled.

"The lawyers almost go overboard," Watkins said. "They don't want to be thought of as the one who didn't deliver good service. There is a peer pressure to provide the best service possible; you don't see that in the larger firms."

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