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Dreams of Biglaw Deferred (Or, The Scene at New Jersey's First Deferred Associates Public Interest Job Fair)

Wednesday, April 8, 2009 4:33 PM - By Kashmir Hill

Your correspondent trekked out to Newark, N.J., to bring you news from the first-of-its-kind (that we know of) **job fair for deferred associates**. With firms **pushing back start dates** at a continually increasing rate, this fair may be the first but will certainly not be the last.

The fair was organized in short time by the Newark-based **Volunteer Lawyers for Justice**. Executive director Karen Sachs, a graduate of NYU Law, saw the magic that could happen by bringing together underfunded and overburdened non-profits with shiny new Biglaw-bound law grads (with deferral stipends attached). Ka-ching for the non-profits; Hallelujah for law grads in need of non-profit jobs to fill their deferred months.



This particular fair was locally focused, with 26 New Jersey organizations in attendance and over 100 attendees, mainly from New Jersey and New York law schools and firms. But Sachs said nonprofits from DC, NYC, and even Tennessee had called her hoping to take part in the economic-crisis-with-a-silver-lining event. Another fair in May that includes out-of-state organizations is a definite possibility, Sachs said.

Non-profit reps from Legal Services orgs, Catholic Charities, Seton Hall Law School Center for Justice and others sat at tables speed-dating style, while deferred 3Ls, jobless law grads, and sabbatical-seeking associates made the rounds. **Mayor Cory Booker** (YLS '97) and White & Case partner **Jack E. Pace III** dropped in to make speeches, emphasizing the silver lining to this. To summarize: Boo for economy; yay young lawyers getting pro bono opportunities, and pro bono orgs getting young lawyers!

Booker, whose career was launched (and law school debt paid) by a Skadden fellowship, said the Biglaw deferrals with stipends attached was "like the Skadden program 20 fold, 50 fold even."

We liked Booker's enthusiasm, Pace's Brooklyn hipster glasses, and the chicken wraps provided, but not everyone was full of good cheer. Incoming associates aren't completely drunk on the silver-lining kool-aid. More after the jump.

When talking to fair attendees, we asked what they thought about the silver lining sentiments expressed by Mayor Booker and Partner Pace. Most of the attendees were less enthusiastic than those two. "It sucks," said one 3L from a New York law school contemplating deferral at a V20 firm (shockingly, none of the students or lawyers with whom we spoke wanted to be outed on ATL). "I'm pretty comfortable that I'll have a job in 2011, but I'm not sure."

Said another 3L from a New Jersey law school: "It sucks. I found out about the deferral on ATL the day

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before hearing from my firm. Class work has fallen to the wayside as I scramble to apply to jobs... I didn't go to law school and incur \$100k worth of debt because I wanted to take time off and write a novel."

Most of the non-profits understandably prefer the Biglaw deferrees who come with a stipend attached. "We haven't made decisions yet about how many we'll bring in. It depends on how much the firms are going to cover. If law firms require nonprofits to spend on health insurance, that might be an issue for us," said Rex Chen, of the Catholic Charities of Newark.

We expressed concern about Biglaw deferrees with funding attached displacing staff members that non-profits already have or would hire. But the non-profits pooh-pooed that suggestion. Said organizer Sachs: "There's no displacement because there's no funding to hire students anyway."

"I don't have funding, but that doesn't decrease my enthusiasm," said Stephanie D., currently clerking in New Jersey and looking for a full-time public interest job next. "I don't feel like I am at a disadvantage, because I've already passed the bar and have a year of experience."

Both Booker and Pace emphasized the skills, training, and rewarding experiences to be had doing public interest work. "Even in a down economy, we have a powerful purpose. There is good coming out of these challenging times," said Booker.

Good luck to the deferred. We hope to see more of these fairs take place.

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