

THE CRÈME DE LA CRÈME



Lavery de Billy takes top spot in Canadian Lawyer's ranking of the top 10 Quebec regional law firm



By Robert Todd | Publication Date: July 2010

Canadian Lawyer's latest top firm survey takes us to Quebec, where regional, full-service firms have established a confident foothold.

One of those firms is BCF LLP, and its managing partner, Mario Charpentier, says any regional firm in Quebec hoping to survive must keep a close eye on its clients' interests. He believes strong rapport with entrepreneurs and CEOs of mid-market companies is the key to his firm's survival in the face of heavy competition from large firms. "We can attract those clients, and we win our battles on this ground," he says.

Cain Lamarre Casgrain Wells LLP president André Gauthier says his firm has honed in on clients' desire to use legal-service providers that are close to home. With offices in 15 cities and towns throughout the province, his firm has blanketed the Quebec map. "That's what we're selling to clients: wherever you are, we're available," says Gauthier. "The first relationship that [brings] a client into an office is the availability of lawyers to serve them. You must be available, or clients will leave you." Gauthier suggests that, while clients may point to high fees for a sudden exodus, the unavailability of service prompts most departures.



Spiegel Sohmer Avocats managing partner Robert Raich agrees that lawyers in Quebec firms must keep client service top of mind. He says lawyers at his firm are sternly advised to respond to all inquiries within a day, and generally pride themselves on offering "super service."

Of course one way smaller firms have always survived is by joining forces. Quebec's regional firm landscape witnessed such a move earlier this year, when Lapointe Rosenstein and Marchand Melançon Forget joined forces on Jan. 1 to create the 88-lawyer strong Lapointe Rosenstein Marchand Melançon LLP.

That move, says Norman Rishikof, a member of the new firm's executive committee, came after Lapointe Rosenstein faced a barrage of takeover offers from large nationals. He says both predecessor firms resisted such overtures, opting to keep their own identities intact. "One of the reasons we did this merger, which to some extent was a merger of equals, was to be able to perpetuate who each of the merged firms is," says Rishikof.

When it comes to the all-important recruitment of top talent, many of the Quebec regional firms are keen to highlight the flexible work environment they offer. Robinson Sheppard Shapiro LLP managing partner Charles Flam says he believes students are increasingly looking for an alternative to the big-firm culture. "When you recruit amongst the best law students, they've heard some horror stories about what happens at the national firms," says Flam.

At the other end of the spectrum, Flam says his firm has landed the services of several older lawyers who were forced to flee large firms due to mandatory retirement policies. "They want to continue their practice, and come here and I've had some of them say to me, 'Where have you been all of my life?'"

How we did it

Canadian Lawyer asked lawyers and in-house counsel from across Canada to vote on Quebec's top full-service, regional firms. They were asked to rank their top 10 firms from a preliminary list, with a chance to nominate a firm that was not included on the list. Respondents' rankings were based on firms' regional service coverage, client base, notable mandates, service excellence, and legal expertise. To be considered in the vote, firms were required to have offices primarily in the province of Quebec and offer a wide range of legal services. The final rankings were determined through a points system, in which firms were rewarded on a sliding scale for the number of first to 10th place votes received.

With Lavery de Billy in the top spot, here are this year's rankings for the top 10 full-service Quebec regional firms.

1. LAVERY DE BILLY (*lavery.ca*)

Total Lawyers: 170

Lawyers by Office: Montreal, 147; Quebec City, 20; Ottawa, 3

Core Practice Areas: business law; financing and financial services; litigation and dispute resolution; labour and employment law; environment, energy, and natural resources

Key Clients: Hydro-Québec, National Bank of Canada, Canadian National Railway Co., SNC-Lavalin Inc., Osisko Mining Corp., Goodyear Canada Inc.

Notable Mandates: acted for the purchaser in the sale of the Montreal Canadiens, the Bell Centre, and its related businesses to a group of investors headed by the Molson brothers; helped Osisko Mining complete a pair of prospectus offerings for proceeds of more than \$552 million and an offering of convertible debentures for a total capital of \$75 million; acted for Industrial Alliance, Insurance and Financial Services Inc. in connection with the issuance of \$100 million of debentures and a public offering of shares that brought in \$100 million

Star Alumni: Justice Lorne Giroux of the Quebec Court of Appeal; Justice Jacques Chamberland of the Quebec Court of Appeal; Sean Finn, executive vice president, corporate services and chief legal officer of Canadian National Railway; Donald McCarty, vice president, law, general counsel, and secretary of Imperial Tobacco Canada; Pamela McGovern, general counsel of Hydro-Québec

Affiliations: World Services Group

The Firm: Lavery de Billy traces its roots to 1979, when Montreal firms O'Brien Smyth Guilbault Pryde Courtois and Lavery Johnston O'Donnell Clark Carrière Mason & Associés merged to become Lavery O'Brien. In 1991, the firm joined forces with Quebec City's Gagnon de Billy Cantin Beaudoin Lesage & Associés, adopting the moniker Lavery de Billy. More than 30 lawyers from the now defunct Desjardins Ducharme law firm joined Lavery in 2007, bulking up its business law and commercial litigation groups.

Voters cited a wide range of reasons for supporting Lavery, pointing specifically to the firm's prompt and reliable service, breadth of legal expertise, and strong client base. "The lawyers I have dealt with at Lavery de Billy have been excellent," wrote one respondent. "They have quickly understood the legal issues raised and have been very responsive in replying to our requests."

The firm's chairman, Richard Dolan, says its roots in the Quebec marketplace make a difference when it comes to attracting work. "With our deep understanding of the Quebec marketplace, and our very active participation in the business community . . . I think it gives us a bit of an edge."

2. LANGLOIS KRONSTRÖM DESJARDINS LLP (*lkd.ca*)

Total Lawyers: 90

Lawyers by Office: Quebec City, 53; Montreal, 37

Core Practice Areas: business law; civil and commercial litigation; labour and administrative law; public and private real estate law; maritime and admiralty law

Key Clients: AXA Assurances Inc., Canadian Tire Corp. Ltd., Banque Nationale du Canada, BCE Inc., TELUS Communications Co., WestJet

Notable Mandates: acted successfully for an intervening shareholder at the Supreme Court of Canada in its decision approving the proposed privatization of BCE; secured the court dismissal of a class action against Canadian Tire, which alleged the company was part of a gas price-fixing cartel; acted for AstraZeneca Canada Inc. in successfully denying a motion to certify a class action lawsuit in the Quebec Superior Court

Star Alumni: Quebec Chief Justice Michel Robert; former Quebec Court of Appeal justice René Dussault; Quebec Superior Court Justice Bernard Godbout

Affiliations: working relationships with firms across Canada and the world to facilitate referrals

The Firm: Established following the 2003 merger of Kronström Desjardins in Quebec City and Lévis, and Langlois Gaudreau in Montreal and Quebec City. Langlois Gaudreau dated back to 1916 as the firm of William Morin, who partnered with Léopold Langlois in 1957. Kronström Desjardins, as it became known in 1992, was founded in Lévis in 1936 by Roger Kronström. The firm shuttered its Lévis office in June.

Voters credited the firm for the quality of its lawyers and mandates. One said its lawyers garner respect for “the excellence of their services in the various fields (insurance, litigation, labour and administrative law, maritime), and their ability to take advantage of the synergies between their various fields of practice in a particular file.”

Michel Beaupré, a member of the firm’s executive committee, says it turns to its lawyers to continue attracting work. “We rely a lot on the entrepreneurship sense of our lawyers,” he says. “We greatly . . . encourage it.”

3. CAIN LAMARRE CASGRAIN WELLS LLP (clcw.ca)

Total Lawyers: 150

Lawyers By Office: Quebec City, 32; Saguenay, 30; Montreal, 29; Drummondville, 13; Rimouski, 9; Sherbrooke, 7; Sept-Îles, 7; Val-d’Or, 6; Alma, 4; Saint-Félicien, 3; Saint-Georges, 3 Plessisville, 2; Amos, 2; Roberval, 2; Amqui, 1

Core Practice Areas: commercial and corporate affairs; banking and finance; labour and employment law; native affairs; public administration

Key Clients: financial institutions; health-care institutions, municipalities, public institutions; First Nations; telecommunications carriers; transportation companies; companies in the energy and natural resources sector

Notable Mandates: constitutionality contests handled by lawyers André Gauthier and Raymond Nepveu on behalf of the Conference of Municipal Judges of Quebec; work for Innu First Nations communities under the Mamuitun Tribal Council to negotiate a modern treaty with the Crown on land claims and self-government; represented the company Transpavé, which was accused in 2007 of criminal negligence causing death following an incident involving an employee

Star Alumni: former Canadian ambassador to France and Quebec premier Lucien Bouchard; Quebec Superior Court justices France Bergeron, Martin Dallaire, and Robert Dufresne

Affiliations: State Capital Group

The Firm: Cain Lamarre Casgrain Wells came on the scene in 1999 following the merger of three firms — Cain Lamarre Wells, founded in 1928 in Chicoutimi; Gauthier Nepveu Leblanc Brouillette, established in Sept-Îles in 1951; and Casgrain Desrosiers Lévesque Bujold Villeneuve, which dated back to 1877.

Firm president André Gauthier says it must now establish a presence in the Gatineau region. “We have to be there,” he says. “It’s more or less looking west, so they have a view of what’s going on in Ontario and the rest of Canada, which is important for us.”

Voters noted Cain Lamarre’s strong regional coverage. “The firm is truly everywhere in the province of Quebec,” remarked one respondent. Another credited the firm for “excellent service with reasonable fees.”

4. LAPOINTE ROSENSTEIN MARCHAND MELANÇON LLP (lrm.com)

Total Lawyers: 88

Lawyers By Office: Montreal, 85; Longueuil, 3

Core Practice Areas: corporate, commercial, and financing; commercial and civil litigation; taxation and estate planning; insurance; intellectual property

Key Clients: insurance companies; manufacturers; financial institutions; retailers, licensors, and franchisors
Notable Mandates: counsel to clients involved in national and international mid-market transactions; involved in a leading case relating to oppression remedies available to shareholders of Quebec companies; class action suits relating to breast cancer and contaminated blood

Star Alumni: Quebec Superior Court Justice Pierre Jasmin

Affiliations: TerraLex Inc.

The Firm: This new firm was spawned on Jan. 1 of this year through the merger of Lapointe Rosenstein and Marchand Melançon Forget. Three of the four founding members of Lapointe Rosenstein — Brahm Gelfand, Alexander Konigsberg, and Mark Rosenstein — continue to practise law with the merged firm. So too do a pair of Marchand Melançon Forget's founding members, Paul Melançon and Michel Marchand.

"They always take my referrals; are reasonably priced and [offer] excellent service," said one voter. "Very pleasant to work with." Another commented that the firm "probably has the best and deepest commercial group of attorneys on the list, backed up by a solid insurance and commercial litigation group."

Norman Rishikof, a member of the firm's executive committee, says each practice group is firing on all cylinders, and there are no immediate plans to bulk up a specific service area.

5. BCF LLP (bcf.ca)

Total Lawyers: 95

Lawyers By Office: Montreal, 80; Quebec City, 15

Core Practice Areas: commercial law; commercial and civil litigation; tax; corporate finance including banking; intellectual property

Key Clients: pharmaceutical, biotechnology, diagnostic, and vaccine-manufacturing companies; universities; banks; pension funds; REITs; media and entertainment companies; private, public, and institutional investors

Notable Mandates: assisted Blue Note Mining Inc. in a recently completed restructuring of \$56 million in debt under the Companies' Creditors Arrangement Act; acted for Louis Dreyfus SAS in a pair of Quebec Superior Court decisions in relation to the annulment and enforcement of international arbitral awards

Star Alumni: Marie-Josée Lapierre, director of legal affairs at Yellow Pages Group

Affiliations: Meritas

The Firm: Established in 1995 under the name Brouillette Charpentier Fournier in Montreal. It opened an office in Quebec City in 2001, the same year it joined Meritas. The firm gained strength with the addition in 2004 of a team of patent and trademark agents from Brouillette Kosie Prince. The firm changed its name to BCF in 2005, which preceded a five-year period of expansion at the firm, with substantial additions made to personnel, offices, and technical resources.

"BCF is responsive, businesslike, and extremely professional," said one voter. Other respondents credited the firm for its mix of expertise and cost-efficiency, along with its provincial coverage.

Managing partner Mario Charpentier says the firm must keep things simple to continue to thrive. "Like a hockey team, we have to keep to our game plan and not try fancy things, and not focus on trying to be everything to everyone," he says.

6. ROBINSON SHEPPARD SHAPIRO LLP (rsslex.com)

Total Lawyers: 74

Lawyers By Office: Montreal, 72; Hong Kong, 1; Beijing 1

Core Practice Areas: business; litigation; insurance; transportation; labour

Key Clients: Burger King Canada; National Bank of Canada; Fonds d'assurance-responsabilité professionnelle de la Chambre des notaires du Québec; Stericycle; Renaissance Capital; Lloyd's Underwriters

Notable Mandates: worked on a leveraged management buyout of a large manufacturing company, involving asset-backed conventional and subordinated credit facilities under various credit agreements; represented Quebec hospitals in various class action lawsuits; worked for the former owner of the Montreal Forum in litigation against the Pepsi Bottling Group Inc. claiming rights, fees, and commissions under a sponsorship agreement

Star Alumni: David Shapiro, vice president and general counsel of Air Canada; Quebec Superior Court justices Francine Nantel and Lucie Fournier

Affiliations: International Lawyers Network

The Firm: Founded in 1921 by Benjamin Robinson and Joseph Shapiro. Until Claude-Armand Sheppard arrived at the firm in 1959, the firm primarily served an anglophone business clientele. It has diversified since the 1960s to become a full-service firm, with an increasing number of francophone clients. Notably, sons of the firm's founding partners — Jonathan Robinson and Barry Shapiro — continue to practise at the firm.

"It has an excellent mix of commercial insurance and litigation lawyers who work effectively and achieve good results at a reasonable cost," said one voter. One respondent enthused that the firm "has by far the best insurance law department in Quebec."

Looking forward, managing partner Charles Flam says he would like the firm to strengthen its presence in business law areas such as intellectual property. "I think our growth, which has historically been consistent and continued, will be that way," he says. "But I see us still as a mid-size firm."

7. DE GRANDPRÉ CHAIT LLP (degrandpre.com)

Total Lawyers: 74

Office: Montreal

Core Practice Areas: real estate; business; construction; litigation; insurance

Key Clients: large real estate developers and property managers, institutional investors and lenders, financial institutions, a top Canadian food retailer, a leading North American retailer, a European leader in construction and infrastructure

Notable Mandates: represented Xebec Adsorption Inc. in the reverse takeover of QuestAir Technologies Inc.; successfully represented a property owner against a longtime business associate in three multimillion-dollar lawsuits; worked for a Canadian real estate investment trust on the financing of a multimillion-dollar acquisition through a cash takeover bid of a TSX-listed real estate corporation

Star Alumni: Quebec Superior Court justices Yves Poirier, Christiane Alary, and Martin Castonguay; Quebec Court Justice Gilles Lareau

Affiliations: Interlaw Ltd., Lexwork International, and the US/Europe Network

The Firm: Established in 1999 through the merger of de Grandpré Godin and Chait Amyot, with its predecessor firms dating back to 1928.

One voter gave the firm general praise for “expertise and coverage of business law,” while another singled out the quality of service and expertise offered by de Grandpré Chait lawyers.

Managing partner Pierre Labelle says the firm continues to rely heavily on its presence in the real estate sector, and hopes to add depth in that and other practice groups, rather than expand into new service areas.

8. STEIN MONAST LLP (steinmonast.ca)

Total Lawyers: 50

Office: Quebec City

Core Practice Areas: corporate law and financing; commercial law; securities; civil and professional liability insurance; labour and employment law

Key Clients: Autorité des marchés financiers, Bridgestone Canada Inc., Chartis, Génome Québec and Genome Canada, National Bank of Canada, Professional Liability Insurance Fund of the Barreau du Québec

Notable Mandates: represented National Bank of Canada at the Supreme Court of Canada in *Quebec (Revenue) v. Caisse populaire Desjardins de Montmagny* regarding provincial legislatures’ ability to modify the order of priority in the Bankruptcy and Insolvency Act; acted as Canadian counsel for CVTech Group Inc. during its acquisition of Riggs & Co.; represented Sensio Technologies Inc. in its \$10-million bought deal financing closed in December 2009

Star Alumni: Quebec Superior Court justices Jean-Francois Émond and Alicia Soldevila; Paule Gauthier, director of the Institut québécois des hautes études internationales of Laval University; former Quebec premier Jean Lesage; former prime minister Louis St-Laurent

Affiliations: Risk Management Counsel of Canada

The Firm: It is the successor of Stein Monast Pratte & Marseille, a Quebec City firm that was founded in 1957. It merged with Montreal’s Desjardins Ducharme from 1992 to 2007. One voter supported this firm by stating it simply has “great lawyers.”

Managing partner Jean Brunet says future plans include an expansion of the firm’s corporate and securities departments. “Labour is quite stable; the growth is really in the corporate and M&A sectors,” he says. “We’ve always be oriented in that area, and it’s going to stay the focus area for the firm.”

9. JOLI-COEUR LACASSE AVOCATS (jolicoeurlacasse.com)

Total Lawyers: 98

Lawyers By Office: Quebec City, 63; Montreal, 30; Trois-Rivières, 5

Core Practice Areas: commercial and international business; insolvency and enforcement of security; real estate; administrative law; civil litigation

Key Clients: entities involved in fields such as engineering, transport, manufacturing, finances, and real estate

Notable Mandates: the acquisition of York Fire & Casualty Insurance Co. by La Capitale Financial Group; the acquisition of a major bus transportation group; the reorganization of the North American activities of a major group of European investors

Star Alumni: Quebec Superior Court Justice Marc St-Pierre, Tribunal administratif du Québec Judge Marie Charest, and former Tribunal du travail du Québec judge Gilles Plante

Affiliations: Pannone Law Group, Lawyers Associated Worldwide

The Firm: Founded in 1983, and in 2007 merged with Pouliot L'Ecuyer, a Quebec City firm, and Lozeau L'Africain of Montreal. Four partners of Quebec City's Grondin Poudrier Bernier Avocats S.E.N.C.R.L. also recently came aboard.

Pierre Chauvette, managing partner of the firm's real estate department, says Joli-Coeur Lacasse has found success in showing its clients the potential benefit of expanding their businesses into emerging economies. "We try to show our Quebec province companies that they have to expand their services into new markets," says Chauvette.

"I have used several firms for agency work in all branches of law, including large Montreal firms," said one voter. "The Joli-Coeur firm surpasses them all in quality and reasonableness of billings."

10. SPIEGEL SOHMER AVOCATS (spiegelsohmer.com)

Total Lawyers: 45

Office: Montreal

Core Practice Areas: personal and corporate tax planning; corporate law; litigation; real estate

Key Clients: Ultramar Ltd., Broccolini Construction Inc., Aéroports de Montréal, Bariatrix Nutrition

Notable Mandates: acted for a consortium of media outlets at the Supreme Court of Canada in *Canadian Broadcasting Corp. v. Attorney General of Quebec*, a freedom of speech case; worked on a limited partnership offering for Broccolini Construction, which raised more than \$75 million

Star Alumni: Liberal MP and former federal justice minister Irwin Cotler

Affiliations: Law Firm Alliance

The Firm: Spiegel Sohmer was established in 1967, and has developed a strong concentration of expertise in tax law which one-third of its lawyers practise. David Sohmer, a founding partner and leading tax law expert, continues to practise.

Managing partner Robert Raich says one of the firm's main strengths is its continued ability to attract "superstar" lawyers to its stable. He believes the future of the firm rests on its ability to continue that trend of offering clients the best lawyers, rather than expanding the size of its bench strength.

One voter said this firm stands above the rest because of the "quality of its litigation partners and strong business group."

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