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THE VERDICTS ARE IN



Who's who among top lawyers?

If we want a nation of laws rather than anarchy, then a by-product is having a nation of lawyers to steer us through the legal mazes. (Which sometimes seem like anarchy.) Here is the latest list of the area's best attorneys. First, though, we will cross-examine:

Who compiled the list of top lawyers? Lists are prepared in cooperation with a national firm that specializes in collecting data on lawyers, Woodward/White Inc.

These lists are excerpted from The Best Lawyers in America® 2011, which includes listings for more than 41,000 lawyers nationwide in 91 specialty areas, in all 50 states and the District of Columbia.

How was the information collected? Through the years Woodward/White has developed a database of lawyers based on the recommendations of their peers. Each attorney was asked to vote on the lawyers listed in their specialty areas and to nominate new names. When necessary, attorneys' names from previous lists were deleted based on either

PROFILES BY MINH DANG

PHOTOGRAPHS BY
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changes in their personal circumstances or for not having enough affirmative votes.

What advantage does this system have? It allows peers to vote for peers and isn't limited to geographic boundaries. Lawyers in a particular field might be aware of colleagues in the same field in other areas. The system brings a national perspective, within areas of specialization to the voting.

Doesn't this approach favor older and more established lawyers since they will have had the time to develop a reputation among colleagues? Yes, there's no perfect way to prepare such a list. We think that this is the best way available. Woodward/White has tried to counter that methodological bias. Its recent lists have had a higher percentage of lawyers under 40 and a higher percentage of women than earlier lists. The company concedes that the lists may tend to award visibility and popularity over sheer ability. Lawyers who give lectures and who write articles are more likely to come to the attention of their colleagues than those who work outside the public eye. We would add, however, that those who are recognized from their speaking and writing are obviously making a contribution that would likely prove their worthiness for the list. It might be said that the list tends to represent an appropriate mix of successful power brokers and "lawyers' lawyers." The company contends that the list represents "the most reliable, accurate and useful guide to the best lawyers in the United States available anywhere."

What question was asked to those attorneys who were surveyed? "If you had a close friend or relative who needed a real estate lawyer (for example), and you couldn't handle the case yourself for reasons of conflict of interest or time – to whom would you refer them?" Those who were interviewed were promised that their comments would remain confidential. They were also encouraged to cast negative votes.

Are attorneys who are surveyed allowed to vote for someone in their own firm? No. They could place an office colleague's names into nomination for consideration, but they could not vote on them.

Do attorneys have to pay to be on the list? No, we wouldn't use the list if that were the case.

Who actually conducted the survey? Staff members of Woodward/White. Data was collected for the Best Lawyers in America publication. A localized list is published here.

What can you say about these lists? We feel confident about two things: 1) There are some were some worthy lawyers whose names don't appear but whom we hope will make future lists. 2) The people named on this list are all top attorneys.

For more information see "Methodology," pg. 122

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