

Orrick to Acquire Coudert Brothers' China Practice (Update2)
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(Adds Curran no comment in the 10th paragraph.)

By Thom Weidlich

Aug. 25 (Bloomberg) -- Orrick, Herrington & Sutcliffe, the 39th-largest U.S. law firm, agreed to acquire most of Coudert Brothers' China practice, the firms said.

"The transfer by Coudert to Orrick of this practice is part of Coudert Brothers' plan to seek combinations for its offices and practices with other firms on a worldwide basis," the firms said in a joint statement today.

The partners of Coudert Brothers, based in New York, voted on that plan last week.

The move would give San Francisco-based Orrick Herrington six partners in Hong Kong, one in Shanghai and two in Beijing. The transition is expected to be completed by the end of September, the statement said.

With salaried lawyers, or associates, a total of 40 will be moving to Orrick Herrington, said a spokesman for that firm, Paul Manuele.

Coudert Brothers' Web site lists five partners in Beijing. One who will not make the move is Jingzhou Tao, Manuele said. Tao is the managing partner of Coudert Brothers' China practice, according to its Web site.

The deal gives Orrick Herrington "an instant China practice," said Bruce MacEwen, a law firm consultant in New York. It currently has only a Taipei outpost with lawyers moving in and out of it, Manuele said.

All Three Offices

"It is smart of Orrick to take all three offices," MacEwen said. "Just one would not give them the platform they need." Many California law firms are looking to open offices in China, he added.

The China business is "the crown jewel of the Coudert practice," said MacEwen, who said he has spoken with several former and current Coudert partners. "I would imagine it's the most profitable part of Coudert, although I don't know that for a fact. That's its reputation."

Coudert Brothers' spokesman Mark Curran declined to comment. Coudert Brothers' clients include the Bank of China/New York, according to its Web site.

Since December, the New York law firm has closed or lost several offices to rivals and has engaged in unsuccessful merger talks, including with Orrick Herrington.

Coudert Brothers last year was the 53rd-largest U.S. law firm by number of lawyers, with 623, according to the National Law Journal, a legal newspaper. That was a drop from 665 lawyers and the No. 44 rank in 2002.

Coudert Brothers is a pioneer in the international practice of law. It was the first U.S. law firm to establish offices in Hong Kong, in 1972; Singapore, in 1972; and Beijing, in 1979, its Web site says.

--Editor: Oster, Pickering.

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