

L.A. firm's new take on 'full-service'

By Kellie Schmitt

RECORDER STAFF WRITER

A healthy, fresh-cooked breakfast, a well-equipped gym, onsite massages and manicures.

It sounds like a brochure for a fancy day spa, or a come-on for a dot-com-era startup, but it's an L.A. law firm.

Westwood's Liner Yankelevitz Sunshine & Regenstreif has added the lifestyle features to ease attorneys' stress and maximize efficiency — after all, time not spent picking up your own dry cleaning is time that can be billed to clients.

After a trial run in October, firm founder Stuart Liner declared the program a permanent fixture this month.

Liner said he got the idea from a conversation with a fellow partner late last summer, in which they discussed how hard it was to balance work and family with all of life's other pleasures and chores, from auto repair and grocery shopping to a pedicure and a good workout at the gym.

So he came up with the next best thing to being two places at once — having someone else go to the second place for you. On top of the free massages, breakfasts and other perks, Liner brought on a two-person concierge service that will do everything from making lunch runs to arranging oil changes.

One day this week, the concierge's list of attorney errands included making a bank deposit, getting auto-repair quotes and delivering a tuxedo. That's on top of their normal Whole Foods and Costco runs.

Recruiter Dan Hatch, the head of Major, Lindsey & Africa's Southern California partner placement, said he hasn't heard of other firms doing such things, but it could draw the right kind of attention.

"If you can provide a service they can't get at other firms," he said, "you're going to have an advantage in recruiting."

He cautioned, though, that such programs could come across as gimmicks, compensating for other, more critical values that a firm lacks.

If it's a gimmick, at least it's not a cheap gimmick. The new fixtures are costing the firm a hefty chunk of money — just the



GETTING IT DONE: The lion's share of the Liner firm's new "lifestyle" firm is concierge Joel Winston, who does everything from arranging concert tickets to picking up dry cleaning.

ALAN J. DUIGNAN

memberships to nearby Equinox gym cost about \$100,000, and the concierge/errand service adds two full-time employees. It comes straight out of partner profits, but Liner says it's worth it.

"There's more productivity, people have better health, and they're in better spirits," he said this week. "I feel strongly that it's an important investment to the people who are part of our family."

And, he added, it doesn't hurt retention or recruiting, especially since it bolsters the 80-lawyer firm's image of being vibrant and youthful. Liner, the managing partner, is just 46.

"We're looking at it as a way to retain lawyers and get the most out of them without cutting into their personal lives," he said. "People are complaining a lot less about time, too."

Liner himself is taking advantage of the new dry cleaning service — and has already gotten two in-firm massages.

Last week, partner Leslie Cohen, a single mother of three, was scrambling to get her work done, and find her 11-year-old daughter a Halloween costume.

Thanks to the concierge, she had some help. He not only picked up materials for the costume (she went as bubble wrap), but also got supplies for another daughter's school project. And he returned Cohen's leased car to the dealership when she got a new one this

month.

When Cohen was in New York for business last month, she called the concierge to arrange tickets to see the Blue Man Group. When she was shopping for friends' holiday presents, she asked him to order some gift boxes online.

Patricia Oliver, who came to the firm a little more than a year ago from Heller Ehrman, said the concierge has been more than a trivial convenience for her. Several weeks ago, she ran into a storm of car troubles, from locking her keys in the trunk to a flat tire to a fender bender.

"I called the concierge, Joel, and said, 'I don't know what to do,'" she said. "He said, 'Don't worry about anything — when do you need your rental car?'"

It wasn't just the 10 to 20 hours he saved her on all of her auto woes; it was also the psychological effect of having the stress lifted, she said.

Oliver said that Liner Yankelevitz has something of a spa-like atmosphere in general. From its light-filled Westwood space to the veggie breakfast burritos, there's something about it that makes her feel healthier, she said.

"It feels like a place of healing," she said. "When I see my friends from Heller, they say 'You look completely different: relaxed and happy.'"

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