

BUSINESS

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Forget hardball, it's softball the lawyers want

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If you thought Austin attracted attorneys because it is a governmental hub or has a growing need for legal expertise in the high-tech field, think again.

Think softball.

According to an article in the March issue of *ABA Journal*, a trade magazine published monthly by the American Bar Association, Austin is one of the top 10 cities for attorneys, especially those who are as interested in practicing their swing as they are in practicing law.

The article — written by

New York City attorney Lawrence Savell, who said the list was developed “unscientifically, superficially, and with undue regard for dining opportunities” — cited the abundance of legal work, inexpensive office space and lack of state income taxes as reasons to locate in Austin.

But “perhaps of greatest interest to lawyers,” Savell wrote, is that Austin boasts more softball players per capita than any other city in the United States.

The city has more than 20 public and private playing fields and about 2,500 league teams playing almost 300 days a year, he said.

While some local lawyers objected to the notion they had enough free time for that type of recreation, they did say exercise is becoming increasingly important to being healthy attorneys.

“I think even among older lawyers who have always been prototypical workaholics there is a growing awareness they need to exercise,” said Joe Bill Watkins, managing partner of Vinson & Elkins. “They need to take a little better care of themselves.”

Watkins said he had played on the firm’s softball team, but it was becoming too demanding to be on the field with younger players.

He said he has heard rumors that some firms will hire young lawyers or law clerks known for their athletic ability in order to win more league games, but that Vinson & Elkins would not consider athletic ability a priority in hiring.

Austin attorney John Hays Jr. said there are other reasons that lawyers want to settle in Austin, especially law students who have become comfortable with the local life style.

“Personally I was never outstanding at softball,” Hays said. “I do consider it very important for lawyers as anyone else to take time to do athletic

and other activities to keep a balanced life. Austin is really an excellent place to be able to do that.”

Apparently Hays is not alone in his thinking.

According to the State Bar of Texas, there are 4,767 attorneys in Travis County, the highest number of lawyers per capita of any county in the state.

And just in case any of those lawyers want to abandon the River City for another locale, the other top cities listed in the *ABA Journal* were: Detroit, Chicago, Indianapolis, Kansas City, Mo., Las Vegas, Louisville, New York City, San Francisco and Seattle.