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Founding partners Chad Johnson, lower left, and David Hellmuth enjoy short commutes to work at their Eden Prairie office. Many of their clients find it convenient to stop at the suburban firm instead of heading downtown.

BY JORDAN STALKER
STAFF WRITER

Just like many of the law firms in downtown Minneapolis, Hellmuth & Johnson occupies the top floor of its office building. But unlike the downtown firms, H&J has a pond behind its building, and a statue of a deer peeks out from bushes on an 'island' in the parking lot.

Profile

We look at the challenges and successes of a small-business owner.

The Eden Prairie office is but a short drive for founding partner, Chad Johnson, who lives in that suburb of Minneapolis. Co-founder David Hellmuth lives slightly farther away, in Edina.

"We chose this location partly for selfish reasons," said Johnson.

The two founded the firm in 1994 and both enjoy the short commute.

Hellmuth & Johnson key in to community association law

"The location also makes it easier on our clients," said Nancy Polomis, one of the firm's real estate attorneys. "It's much easier for a client who is doing contract work out here to swing by our office on

the way to the site, than to worry about going downtown."

One of the largest areas of the firm's practice is community association law for condominiums, apartment buildings and homeowner groups. The firm has five lawyers in the community association practice, more than any similarly sized firm. Both Hellmuth and Johnson have served on the board of directors of the Community Association Institute of Minnesota. Hellmuth is the organization's president, and Johnson held the post a few years ago. As a result of their involvement with CAI, Johnson and Hellmuth often hold seminars and publish newsletters dealing with related legal issues.

"When I get a legal question, one of my first calls is to Dave," said David Ewald, executive director of CAI Minnesota, who has worked with Hellmuth for the past three years.

That makes sense to Pete Rocheford, an

HELLMUTH & JOHNSON

Founding partners: David Hellmuth and Chad Johnson

Business: Law firm focusing on community association, real estate, construction and business law

Location: Eden Prairie

Revenue: \$5.9 million in 2005

Founded: 1994

Web site: www.hjlawfirm.com

Employees: 59

H&J client and president of Rockford Inc., a project management firm.

“Board members often don’t have a lot of experience in what to do if there’s a problem,” he said. He also appreciates H&J’s ability to incorporate several lawyers on one case and thereby avoid confusion.

Some larger firms base their success on the number of lawyers they have or the number of practice areas they advertise. H&J relies on its documented performance to build its client base.

“We’re not driven by numbers,” said Johnson.

For example, he does not want the firm to cover every aspect of law. If a client has a need for a type of law not covered by H&J, the counseling attorney is trained to exhaust his or her network of contacts to find someone who can help the client.

“We want our attorneys to be the general counsel to their client,” said Johnson. He is confident in his clients’ loyalty and isn’t shy about referring them elsewhere for specific services.

The rise of intellectual-property concerns — especially in a technology-heavy business climate like the Twin Cities —

would seem to make it a necessary practice at every law firm. However, none of the lawyers at H&J offer intellectual-property services because IP law is too specialized, Johnson said.

Real estate attorney Nancy Polomis is grateful that the firm’s philosophy doesn’t require her to claim unlimited expertise.

“I don’t want to be mediocre in 16 areas,” she said.

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