



LAW OFFICERS: Francisco Gonzalez, left, is director of international services, and Hank Adorno president and CEO of Miami-based law firm Adorno & Yoss. Nearly 70 percent of the firm is Hispanic or African-American. Photo/Michael Francis McElroy

DIVERSE INTERESTS

BY SANDRA HERNANDEZ
STAFF WRITER

Wearing a cream-colored *guayabera*, Hank Adorno walks into his Coconut Grove office looking more like a tourist than the man at the helm of the largest minority-owned law firm in the nation.

But the 56-year-old Cuban-American isn't worried about his laid-back appearance. After all, he recently sealed a deal with a California law firm that firmly establishes **Adorno & Yoss** as a bicoastal powerhouse that stresses diversity as one of its biggest assets. And later this month he expects to sign another agreement with a Mexico-based firm that will expand Adorno & Yoss' reach internationally.

"This is a response to what our clients are asking us for, a combination of bun-

Law firm Adorno & Yoss reaches out for both employees and clients.

dling of services and a real emphasis on diversity," says Adorno, who serves as the firm's president and chief executive officer.

In addition to being minority owned with offices in nine cities including Miami, Los Angeles and Atlanta, nearly 70 percent of its 185 attorneys are Hispanic or African-American.

Started in 1986 by Adorno and two other lawyers, the company is now a national firm with revenues expected to top \$65 million in 2005. Much of the growth is due to its emphasis on diversity that has drawn lo-

cal and national corporations who are increasingly shopping for greater minority representation.

Among its big clients early-on was Jorge Mas Canosa, the famed exile leader and founder of the Cuban American National Foundation. Adorno briefly left the firm in 1998 to join **MasTec**, a cable-laying firm run by Mas Canosa's sons after the elder's death. But by 2000, Adorno left the company suing for breach of employment.

He returned to his old firm, where Adorno and his partners continued to spotlight their emphasis on diversity. It paid off.

Today, Adorno & Yoss' client list includes Fortune 500 companies such as **Johnson Controls Inc.**, a Wisconsin-based

Law firm reaching out into Latin America

■ MINORITY

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automotive supplier company with sales topping \$22.6 billion in 2003. And thanks to its new partnership with the California based **Alvarado, Smith & Sanchez**, it has added international companies such as **Gigante**, Mexico's second-largest supermarket and **Banco Santander**, a Latin American banking giant.

Adorno smiles at the mention of words such as "maverick" or "visionary," saying the success of a minority-owned firm shouldn't surprise anyone, especially not in a region such as South Florida where diversity is a way of life.

"We are simply a mirror of the demographic shift that has taken place," he says, referring to the changing ethnic make-up of the United States. Hispanics are expected to become the largest minority in the coming years, according to the U.S. Census.

Still, Adorno credits South Florida with helping ease the way for such a firm to flourish.

"I'm not sure this firm could have achieved what it has anywhere else but here in Miami," says Adorno. "In the legal community you have to crack the good old boy system. But here in Miami I think that system was cracked years ago. Hispanics are ingrained into the business and political scene."

The result is a firm that can compete with larger legal groups all fighting for a share of the work corporations farm out while at the same time reflecting America's multiethnic population.

A 2003 report by the Minority Corporate Counsel Association, which promotes the hiring of minority attorneys, found corporations are increasingly fo-

cused on diversity issues, according to the *Princeton Law Review*.

But until recently, corporations have had few choices when it came to legal firms capable of supplying national service.

"There are minority firms in just about every large city, but when a Fortune 500 company is looking for someone to handle their law needs they require someone who can practice in multiple cities," says Harriett Mitchell, president of the New York based-National Minority Supplier Development Council, Inc, or NMSDC. The council helps match corporations with minority suppliers. That difference isn't just in its ownership but also in the diverse background of its lawyers. Many of Adorno & Yoss' associates and key players hail from Latin America. That background is an attractive draw for companies seeking attorneys who are familiar with business in the *United States and abroad*.

"We can truly provide services without having to overcome knowledge barriers," said Francisco Gonzalez, director of international services for the firm. While diversity is increasingly a factor in gaining corporate America's business, it's quality that matters most, say Adorno and his newest partners.

"At the end of the day it is about quality of services and the fact that a firm is diverse is simply frosting on the cakes," says Ruben Smith, a partner at Alvarado, Smith & Sanchez. "Our plan isn't just to be a Hispanic or African-American firm but to be a powerful engine in terms of providing legal services."

Sandra Hernandez can be reached at shernandez@sun-sentinel.com or 954-356-4514.