



## Living and Practicing Law in Miami

[Erica Winter]

A complex legal system combined with great weather and a mix of nationalities that provides a vibrant social scene? It could only be Miami. LawCrossing talked with some legal professionals in Miami to find out everything from the hot practice areas to the hot places to live.

Want to move to Miami-Dade County? So do a lot of other people.

Miami-Dade's population increased by 87,388 people between 2000 and 2003, bringing the total county population to over 2.3 million, according to estimates from the U.S. Census Bureau, released April 8. Miami-Dade is the eighth largest county in the nation, and the increase in its number of new residents ranked thirteenth among all U.S. counties.

And, while we're talking numbers, there are 222 attorney jobs in Miami and 150 in Fort Lauderdale posted on LawCrossing right now. Many of those positions are litigation jobs, with a demand for real estate, bankruptcy, and several other attorney specialties also present.

Overall, every one we talked to agreed that, in both population and law practice, Miami-Dade County is nothing if not diverse. If you do decide to join in on the move to Miami, you will almost definitely find a place to fit in.

### Practicing here.

Miami is not as slow and easygoing as its beaches would suggest.

Miami is a large city with busy dockets, many big businesses and a fast pace of professional life, says Laura Anthony, alumna of Florida State University Law School and a corporate and securities attorney with Legal & Compliance, LLC.

Compared to a smaller town, where a hand-

shake might work, you have to put everything in writing, Anthony says. "There is professional courtesy in Miami," says Anthony, "but you can't bet on it."

Anthony, who has been practicing in Miami for 11 years, came down to Florida to join family who had moved here from Ontario, Canada, went to college and law school here, and never left. She was with a large firm before becoming in-house counsel for a company, and then launched her own firm two years ago. There is a lot of competition in Miami, so you have to work to succeed, she says.

Up-and-coming fields in Miami include entertainment, environmental, and import-export law, says Anthony. And, if you are interested in securities law or litigation, and you are ready to put in some hard work, Anthony's firm is searching for two attorneys right now - check out the LawCrossing job listings for details.

Miami is not what you might think of when you think of a "Southern" city in which every one knows each other and the legal profession is steeped in civility. Many of the attorneys we spoke with likened the pace of legal life here to the faster feel of Los Angeles, New York and San Francisco.

Still, while the pace may be more like New York than Savannah, most of all, Miami is a highly diverse international city, often called "The Gateway to Latin America," where many international businesses make a home base.

Andrew Koerner, an immigration attorney

with Leaf & Associates, came back to Florida one-and-a-half years ago after a stint in New York City, first at a brokerage firm, then in law school at The Benjamin N. Cardozo School of Law at Yeshiva University, and then practicing immigration law.

A native of West Palm Beach, he says two main things spurred him into leaving New York. First, business slowed so much at his New York immigration firm after the September 11th attacks that he was reduced to working part-time, and second, doing asylum work became "very difficult to continue day in and day out."

Koerner had started doing asylum immigration work at a law school clinic and continued with it after getting his degree. There are three ways to immigrate into the U.S.: labor, family and asylum. To be granted asylum, the client - and his attorney - must prove that the client was persecuted in his home country, or that the client has a "well-founded fear" of persecution if he or she returns. Applications need to be highly detailed to prove that the applicant is not trying to pull a fast one.

With five cases at a time, Koerner spent all day in his office overlooking Ground Zero across the street, listening to stories of torture and oppression from people who were desperate to be allowed to stay in the U.S. While the work was "extremely rewarding," says Koerner, it was hard to let go of some of those details when he returned home at night.

Now Koerner sees sun and palm trees and

blue water out of his window, and works with business clients who are seeking labor immigration - so they can stay and work at one of the many international businesses coming to Miami, such as shipping companies or banks. He usually works with bankers, doctors, engineers, and some models and actors.

Working in labor immigration is still rewarding, Koerner says, "people are brought to tears" when they succeed, "even bankers, scientists, it's a very personal experience."

Immigration is a growing field of law in Miami, and will grow more, Koerner says, when the state starts cracking down harder on non-lawyers setting up shop to offer "legal" assistance to hopeful immigrants.

International banking and tax work are "skyrocketing" in Miami, says Koerner. All of the Latin American banks have offices, some even headquarters, in Miami. As a result, many European banks have opened offices here as well.

Miami is a "vibrant, young, entrepreneurial city," says Steven Robert Kozlowski, a business, arts and entertainment attorney with Kozlowski Law Firm, P.A., and Vice President of the Miami-Dade Gay and Lesbian Chamber of Commerce.

There is a "growing visual arts community" in Miami, which is the basis for Kozlowski's practice. A graduate of the University of Miami School of Law, Kozlowski studied creative writing and music, and parlayed his interest in the arts into a legal career. He works with artists and small businesses on contract, royalty, licensing and copyright issues in both litigation and transactional work.

"I help creative people realize that they are businesses and businesses realize that they are creative," says Kozlowski, whose new offices are in a renovated art house theater that also showcases clients' artwork.

Kozlowski does not encounter anti-gay discrimination in his litigation work, and there is a strong network of gay and lesbian professionals in the Miami region. He does see the famed South Beach (another name for Miami Beach) mellowing a bit with time. While you still see people out having fun, you will also see more business lunches, as well as people sunning on the beach.

"You get people of all kinds down here," says Kozlowski. The key to making it in Miami's legal field is working hard, he says, not necessarily fitting into a specific type. Florida's state laws, however, are known for being anti-gay, most notably banning gays from adopting children, even if the adoption is included in a relative's will. If your children were adopted in another state, however, that would stand.

For women lawyers in Miami, there is some discrimination, but this is "not unique to Miami," says Deborah Magid, Senior Attorney with HELP, Inc., (The HIV Education and Law Project), and a legal writing instructor at the St. Thomas University School of Law. She is also the head of the Florida Association of Women Lawyers' Miami-Dade chapter.

Magid recently came to HELP from working in the state attorney's office as a prosecutor. An alumna of the University of Miami School of Law, Magid has been practicing for 17 years. She sees many women attorneys go into government work because larger firms tend to have inadequate or nonexistent maternity leave policies.

Most discrimination she sees and hears about is aimed at younger women, who are sometimes patronized by opposing counsel, by, for example, being mistaken for courthouse staff, or yelled at in attempts at intimidation. Still, "most of the bar down here is pretty good," she says, with those causing static still in the minority.

As for African-American attorneys, they are not as established in Miami as they are in At-

lanta, Washington D.C., or Chicago says Alana Dasent, Director of the Career Planning Center at the University of Miami School of Law.

African-American litigators in Miami are often successful; Dasent hears more complaints from those trying to make a go of corporate law, where African-Americans seem to get passed-over on occasion in favor of Caucasian or Latino colleagues.

Still, as with any attorney, if you are highly qualified, you can rise to the top, says Dasent. If you speak Spanish, are skilled at international work or in litigation, Miami is "a great place to be, and opportunities are opening up" for African-Americans.

Overall, the legal climate in Miami is "very litigious," says Randee Breitor, Associate Director of the University of Miami School of Law's Career Planning Center. While transactional law might hold several opportunities for lateral career moves, litigators are finding the most work in town, and litigation is the best bet for newer attorneys, she says.

Miami does not have the mega-firms seen in many large cities, Breitor says, with most Miami-based firms staying at medium to small sizes. Even the largest firms, such as Greenberg Traurig, only hire ten summer associates every year.

With fewer entry-level positions at firms in Miami than most cities and four law schools, competition is tough for all lawyers in this town.

### Town Company

While Washington, D.C. has the federal government, and Los Angeles has the movie industry, Miami has the ocean. If there is a "town company" in this town, it's tourism. If there is another, it's international business, especially those from Latin America. People in Miami reflect a wide range of nationalities, many first-generation Americans.

James M. Walker says he always wanted to travel the world. Now, in his Miami law practice, "the world comes to me," he says.

Walker, an alumnus of the Tulane School of Law, handles personal injury cases for employees and patrons of one of Miami's biggest businesses: cruise ships. Currently, Walker has clients from Croatia, Peru, England and Canada, since the staff of even one ship typically includes many nationalities.

Not only the people, but also the laws involved in these cases, are highly diverse. There are several nuances to this niche in personal injury law that makes his work "colorful and flavorful," Walker says. His cases often involve maritime, international, contract, and labor law, among other specialties.

Walker took the full maritime law curriculum at Tulane, and worked defending shipping lines for five years in New Orleans before coming to Miami in 1987. He continued working at a large firm, defending shipping companies until 1999, when he switched sides and opened his four-attorney firm.

Why the switch? "I prefer to represent the underdog," Walker says, "it is far more rewarding and fulfilling."

And there is no shortage of cases. This is mainly because the fine print on the back of many cruise tickets - and cruise employment contracts - includes a choice of forum clause that requires lawsuits against cruise lines to be brought in Miami-Dade County, or nearby Fort Lauderdale, no matter where the plaintiff lives or where the incident at issue took place.

For example, Walker says, if a couple from Tennessee goes on a cruise from Los Angeles to Mexico, and one of them is injured while the ship is in international waters, and they want to sue the cruise line, they have to file suit in Miami. Because of this, Walker works with the plaintiff's local attorney as co-counsel for about one-third of his cases.

Then there is a "double whammy," says Walker: many tickets also hold a one year statute of limitation. Typically, the plaintiff in personal injury cases has about three or four years to file. If the case is against a cruise line, however, tickets and contracts often allow only one year.

Because of those two clauses, a plaintiff must find an attorney in Miami.

Walker currently has "hundreds" of cases pending for cruise ship staff members, and those cases represent only about half of his clients, with half filed on behalf of passengers. Most of his cases are filed due to sexual assaults, physical assaults, minor injuries from falls, and inadequate medical care provided on the ship, Walker says.

Juries in Miami-Dade County are not overly sympathetic to cruise line companies, says Walker, even though the companies are big business in town. Royal Caribbean Cruise Lines was fined millions of dollars for dumping toxins in the ocean. Carnival Cruise Lines earns \$1 billion a year and owns the Miami Heat basketball team, but the company did not foot the bill for a new arena, letting the taxpayers pay instead, Walker says.

Overall, Miami juries seem to be sympathetic to those who were injured, and are not biased towards the cruise lines. Another plus: the city itself is so diverse, with people from so many different countries here as first-generation Americans, foreign plaintiffs see sympathy from jurors from Haiti, Columbia, Cuba, and many other countries.

### Money

By all accounts, the cost of living is going up in Miami, but business is booming as well. You'll see more competition for that legal job than you might in other places, but you also might see a higher salary. You'll need it if you want to buy a house.

The attorneys we talked to love where they live, and said that housing prices are increasing. A quick internet search for houses in the city of Miami bore that out. When we looked for houses with four or more bedrooms and two or more baths in Miami that cost \$350,000 and up (the same search we did for Atlanta a few weeks back), we only found 58 houses.

We changed that to three bedrooms or more and one-and-a-half baths costing \$300,000 and got 107 results - some of them nice, some not so much.

We included condos in the search, and found that they are not necessarily cheaper than houses - with some condos in the \$2 to \$4.5 million range. A casual survey of listings proves the expected: you pay for a beach view, and even more for beach access. And if you can get a place on Fisher Island - we wish you well, and wonder why you are still working so hard.

### Living here

Keep in mind that Miami-Dade County holds several municipalities all packed into south-east Florida, including Miami, Miami Beach, Coral Gables and Fort Lauderdale.

Miami also holds more nationalities than you can imagine if you live elsewhere in the country. Far more people in Miami speak only Spanish than only English. It is not uncommon to hear people speaking Creole - or French or German. Tourism, international banking, and a very strong connection to Latin America make this city highly diverse.

Speaking Spanish is not required to live or work here, but it does connect you to the powers-that-be, especially socially, many said.

Most of the people we spoke with love the international feel of the place. "I'm a white male, I'm a minority, and I love it," says James M. Walker. The music, the food and the wide variety of people all got several mentions of



praise.

Still, with such a variety of cultures and nationalities all in one place, there are some clashes of opinions and styles here, says Steven Robert Kozlowski; but that same energy is what makes the city "powerful," and a great place to be.

"You will see ten people with ten different ways of doing the same thing, and they may not all get along but, so be it," says Kozlowski, "that's part of what makes Miami a great place."

Living in Miami is about having all of the excitement of living in an international city, and then you can "go watch the sun set on the beach," says Laura Anthony.

"Living in Miami is great," says Walker.

If you're young and single, live on Miami Beach, recommends Walker. There are lots of restaurants, night life, places to go and people to see. If you are married with kids, look at Pinecrest, Coral Gables or Kendall. Walker lives ten miles south of Miami in Pinecrest, which has a reputation for the best public schools in the area.

As for traffic - Walker used to work downtown and it took him an hour to drive 15 miles. Now he lives a mile from his office and his commute clocks at four minutes. Try to find a place to live close to your office, recommends Laura Anthony. You can often find less expensive places nestled between very pricey buildings.

Just because you see people in bathing suits a lot does not mean that business attire is informal. However, there are concessions made to the climate, says Anthony. Pantyhose? "Never," says Anthony, it's just too hot and humid; but also, no very short skirts either. Male attorneys will wear suits, but they take their jackets off when the heat weighs in.

### Miami Advice

1. Make connections when you get to town by joining the local bar association and doing charity work after hours, says Anthony. This will help in your professional life. Even so, she says, "nothing is going to replace hard work."

2. Come to Miami after you have found a job, says Deborah Magid; the market here is tough and there are a lot of applicants for each position. You can bet on working very long hours, especially if you have just graduated - this is the one thing her students don't seem to realize, she says.

3. If you want to get a legal job right out of law school in Miami, then going to law school here definitely helps, says Randee Breitor. Or, if you are in law school elsewhere, spend your summers here, she recommends, and demonstrate an interest in being here if you want to get hired. Laura Anthony agrees: when job-hunting, whether you have just graduated or are in a mid-career shift, you need to show that you are in Miami for more than just the sun. Of course, "excellence in your specialty is still number one," says Breitor. A star tax attorney from DC would have less to prove than a recent grad.

4. This is a great place to learn another language besides English - whether it be Spanish, or Creole, which Magid is currently studying.

5. Miami can be a city of extremes, a "very intense place" says Steven Robert Kozlowski. There are a lot of different cultures in Miami, "it's wonderful," says Kozlowski. Thinking of taking a job here? Most importantly, you should "leave your preconceived notions at home and come see [Miami] for yourself."