

Kegler Brown among Ohio's exporting excellence honorees

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For the second time in four years, local firm Kegler Brown Hill & Ritter was selected by the Ohio Department of Development and Gov. Ted Strickland as one of Ohio's exporting leaders for 2009.

The only legal industry two-time honoree in the program's 22-year history to receive the Governor's Excellence in Exporting award, Kegler Brown was selected for the honor due to its strong international legal practice, said Martijn Steger, attorney and director of international law and business at the firm.

"I think Kegler Brown was chosen in light of its efforts to assist Ohio's exporters in expanding in markets outside of the United States," Steger said. "Our view about the international law practice that we've had for over 20 years now is that it provides an opportunity for us to assist major exporters as they grow sales over the entire world, and as they do, they are able to expand their employment in Ohio."

Kegler Brown aims to support the ODOD's efforts in providing services to exporters, as the department provides market studies in other countries such as India or China to see how large markets might be for a specific company's products. The ODOD also helps find potential partners or distributors for companies' products, Steger added, and the firm's job is to help provide the legal framework needed during interactions - distribution agreements or product development agreements - when companies are working with companies in another country.

"We also help companies in Ohio buy companies in other countries, helping them with joint-venture agreements, and we provide the legal services to support exporters' activities around the globe," Steger said, adding that Kegler Brown coordinates its legal efforts as a "build on" to the services provided by the ODOD.

Kegler Brown has served as legal counsel to some of the state's top exporters under Steger's leadership for nearly 20 years, including within the industries of health information technology, pharmaceuticals, transportation/logistics, plastics manufacturing, educational services, food services, real estate, architecture, engineering, construction, telecommunications, software and machinery. Regularly doing business in the major markets around the world, including in India, Europe, South America, Central America, the Caribbean, Africa, the Middle East, Asia and the Pacific Rim, Kegler Brown's clients aid a majority of

manufacturers and exporters of goods and services, Steger said.

"The firm has worked with some of the largest publicly traded companies, all the way down to the very small- and medium-sized companies. It is a broad range in terms of size and in terms of industries," Steger said.

For several years, Kegler Brown has worked to strengthen its relationships with entities in powerful international markets, including India, China, Germany, the United Kingdom and France, said Jeff Dennis, marketing and business development manager for the firm.

"As Ohio's economy has become increasingly intertwined with the economies of other major markets, our services have become critical components of successful business plans for many of our clients," Dennis said, adding that India is one international export market with which the firm has developed a close bond.

In order to support the firm's commitment to the global marketplace, Kegler Brown hired Vinita Bahri-Mehra, an experienced corporate and international attorney already licensed in India several years ago, Dennis said. Vinita obtained an Ohio law license in 2005, Dennis added, and Kegler Brown now understands her to be the only dual-licensed lawyer in Ohio.

"Vinita is an incredibly dynamic attorney with a unique skill set that allows our firm to assist Ohio-based companies with their legal needs in India and to help Ohio attract companies from India to locate here and hire Ohioans as employees. The growth of our international practice in Columbus and abroad, combined with a strong focus on the Indian market, has positioned our firm as a viable candidate for programs like the Governor's Excellence in Exporting award," Dennis said.

No monetary or promotional benefit comes with being a recipient of the exporting award, and once an organization is awarded it is not eligible for another four years. Kegler Brown previously won the award in 2005.

"Becoming the legal industry's only two-time honoree in the program's history makes us even more committed to continue growing our international practice, and proving that cross-border expansion is and should be an increasingly vital part of our clients' growth strategies," Dennis said.