

# Lawyers gain from time off

MARGARET  
GRAHAM TEBB

**L**AWYERS AND LAW FIRMS CAN BOTH benefit from well-designed sabbatical programs.

That was the consensus among representatives from three large Washington, D.C., law firms at a Friday seminar, "Lawyer Sabbaticals: Career Suicide or Competitive Solution? You Be the Judge." The event was sponsored by the ABA Career Resource Center.

Law firms proffer a variety of arguments as to why a sabbatical program is an unworkable idea, panelists said. Among them are costs, the fear that some lawyers will decide not to return and resentment from lawyers left to pick up the slack.

Panelists acknowledged those drawbacks, but stressed the advantages.

"At my firm, we've never even bothered to calculate the financial cost, because we believe the program is so valuable that the cost is immaterial," said James J. Sandman, a partner with Arnold & Porter.

Sandman's firm sets a limit of not

more than 10 percent of partners on sabbatical at any one time. Sabbaticals range from three to nine months for partners with at least seven years tenure.

Hogan & Hartson addresses the problems of colleague resentment and covering client needs by making it the responsibility of the sojourning lawyer to line up others in his or her practice group to cover the work, said partner Ann Morgan Vickery.

The arrangement "gives younger lawyers more opportunities to step up and take responsibility, and allows the sabbatical lawyer to come back fresh and renewed," Vickery said.

At Wilmer, Cutler & Pickering, the lawyer who wishes to take a sabbatical must receive permission from the head of his or her practice group, as well as from the management committee.

"The lawyer must first establish [a] practice. We don't advocate someone who has a problematic practice deciding not to deal with the real issues by going on sabbatical. But a well-established lawyer can benefit greatly from the opportunity," said William J. Perlstein, of the firm's management committee. ■