

By Rebecca Larsen

# DL Investigations & Attorney Support, LLC



**W**hen Patrick Smallwood got his business degree from Arizona State University in 1990, a mini-recession was going on, and he couldn't find a job.

"But I always knew I wanted to work for myself," he says. "From the get-go, I knew that was the right thing for me to do." It was that early seed that eventually grew into his company DL Investigations & Attorney Support, LLC, of Phoenix.

While in college, Smallwood had worked at a company doing filings and process service for law firms, an experience that made him confident he could run a similar operation. At first, he went into business with partners in investigations and attorney support. He is now the sole owner of his firm.

DL Investigations has been operating in Phoenix for 16 years, though it took about six or seven years to get his early business going strong.

"I never had any trouble paying the rent, but I was easily working 16 hours a day," he says. "By day, I'd do pickups from the law firms myself and file the paperwork and legal documents. At night, I'd do the process-serving. I'd drive 300 miles a day, going to North Phoenix, Scottsdale, Mesa, and Tempe."

That initial running around as a courier brought him contacts with key people.

"I made friends with the secretaries at the law firms as well as the attorneys. It's a tight knit community out there that at times will move from firm to firm. And when they'd change jobs, they'd convince the new firms to hire me," he says. Now he's primarily involved in marketing and management rather than the deliveries themselves, and has a staff of 16, including several that have been with him for ten plus years.

While ninety percent of his business is in Maricopa County, he does service all parts of Arizona and can arrange service all over the country. He attributes the firm's success to good communication with clients.

"The biggest reason why lawyers leave attorney support firms is due to problems with communication," Smallwood says. "We make regular phone calls. We let people know what's going on, and what has happened to their documents. We're loyal and we communicate. We want to make our customers happy."

One satisfied paralegal is Leanne Thomas of Poli & Ball, P.L.C. in Phoenix: "His firm allows me to rely heavily on them to help make my job easier. They do their work on time and return my calls with updates as soon as possible."

One of Smallwood's friends, Michael Ferraro, is an attorney with Diane M. Lucas P.C., which uses DL's services.

"He has a conscientious and prompt group of employees who are able to explain filings and processes at clerk's offices in a manner that even we attorneys can understand," Ferraro says. "If there's a problem with a filing, it's taken care of right away."

Among services provided by the firm are: process serving, skip tracing, court runs, delivery of documents, research and investigation, document retrieval, and on-site messenger service for larger law firms. The core of his business is service of process and skip tracing. DL Investigations goes to Pima & Pinal counties daily.

One big change in the business recently has come with the Internet. DL Investigations has an interactive Web site that clients can use to update the status of their documents, submit new job requests, and the clients can also print certificates of service off the Web site, at their convenience.



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