

THE LAWYERS WEEKLY

Visible minority lawyers

By Oliver Bertin
Toronto
September 11 2009 issue

From the reserve to a Bay St. firm

Jaimie Lickers is the exception to the rule or, as she would prefer, the wave of the future.

An aboriginal woman, she has made her way from the reserve to a Bay Street law firm as an associate in the Ottawa office of Blake, Cassels & Graydon LLP, where she is considered one of the bright lights in the litigation department.

And, to top it off, she has a balanced home life. She is married to an academic at one of Ottawa's universities and she is doing the work she loves.

"I love being a lawyer for a big national firm because I get to see every litigation file that comes through the office," said the 28-year-old. "It's all new and exciting at this point."

Lickers describes herself "as one of those people who always wanted to be a lawyer." It didn't occur to her that law was a tough discipline to enter, especially for an aboriginal child raised on a reserve.

But she was lucky to have the support of her parents and a progressive band council at the Six Nations of the Grand River reserve, near Brantford, Ont., that has worked hard to foster education in their children.

An Iroquois, she did well in her local high school in Caledonia, Ont., went on to Queen's University for an honours B.A., then got her law degree in 2007 before her call to the Bar in 2008.

Along the way, she went to Austria to compete in a commercial arbitration moot and received an honourable mention in a speaking competition. That was followed by an offer of a job in the litigation department at Blakes and a transfer to Ottawa to join her husband.

Lickers gives considerable credit to her family and the band council, who supported her through high school and university. She won many scholarships and bursaries from the council and from such national bodies as the National Aboriginal Achievement Foundation.

"It is great that achievements are celebrated," she said.

Lickers also praises her employer, a firm that has a reputation for promoting diversity. "I never pictured myself working for a Bay Street firm," she said. But she changed her mind while working on two highly controversial land claims issues, in Ipperwash, Ont. and Caledonia, Ont. She was impressed with the

lawyers who worked on these cases and decided to join them.

Lickers still works on aboriginal issues in Blakes' Ottawa office, where she can contribute her unique perspective, but she prefers the variety of litigation that comes her way, from real estate to construction, contractual disputes, money laundering and judicial reviews.

"There's a real commitment at Blakes to help associates learn about every area," she said. "But there's also an opportunity to work on files that are of personal interest."