

San Jose attorney to become state bar's chief trial counsel

swebby@mercurynews.com

Posted: 06/11/2010 07:50:05 PM PDT

Updated: 06/11/2010 08:56:15 PM PDT

The State Bar of California has picked a prominent 61-year-old San Jose attorney with an expertise in ethics to oversee the disciplining and disbaring of incompetent, corrupt and criminal attorneys among the state's 160,000 lawyers.

If confirmed by the state Senate as the bar's chief trial counsel, James Towery will resign as a partner in San Jose's Hoge, Fenton, Jones & Appel and begin a four-year term as chief trial counsel overseeing the bar's office of 250 attorneys, investigators and support staff, based in San Francisco and Los Angeles.

The discipline office receives thousands of complaints annually, investigates about 5,000 misconduct allegations and prosecutes some 500 lawyers a year. About 60 a year end up disbarred. The office has an annual budget of \$40 million.

"The California bar's discipline system is the largest in the country and also the most professional," Towery said. "It's an extraordinary challenge. I'm humbled and honored."

Towery is married to Santa Clara County Assistant District Attorney Karyn Sinunu-Towery.

The state bar position has been vacant for a year, since Scott Drexel was dumped by the bar after a tenure that some felt was marred by overzealousness, including Santa Clara County prosecutors targeted for violating ethics rules.

Towery had served as president of the State Bar of California in 1995-96

"What we were looking for," said Bill Hebert, chairman of the bar board's

discipline committee, "was somebody who was an expert on ethics and has ideas about how to improve the discipline system while keeping it fair. Jim Towery exhibits a mastery and knowledge of the discipline system that I think is unequaled by any outsider."

Contact Sean Webby at 408-920-5003.

Advertisement