



APRIL/MAY/JUNE 2012

Making Moves

U-Haul International's entrepreneurial origin makes it a perfect fit for Thomas Félix Tollison, senior assistant general counsel for the marketing group, who always envisioned a future as a corporate counsel.

by Matt Alderton



One of the country's most recognizable vehicles is a U-Haul truck. White with an iconic orange cummerbund, it's a mascot of the American roadway. While everyone knows its trucks, what few people realize about U-Haul International is that a husband and wife started it in a garage in 1945 with only \$5,000 in savings—an entrepreneurial origin that makes it a perfect fit for Thomas “Tom” Félix Tollison, senior assistant general counsel for U-Haul’s marketing group. “I come from a background of entrepreneurs,” says Tollison, who was born in Albuquerque, New Mexico, in 1968. “My family emigrated here from northern Spain. They weren’t doctors or lawyers, so they started their own businesses. For example, my grandfather had a grocery store, and at one time he had a restaurant and a roller-skating rink.”

Originally a teacher, Tollison’s mother also was a business owner, as she started her own in-home health-care company in 1981. “I remember very specifically—even in high school—running errands, answering phones, and filing papers for my mother in

her business,” Tollison says. “More poignantly, I remember there being quite a lot of regulations and issues that involved attorneys and state governments and contracts. I remember my mother trying to understand those things, and I remember thinking, ‘Gosh, it would be nice if we had a lawyer on staff or in the family who could help my mother out with those things.’”

Determined to be that lawyer, Tollison went to law school at Southern Methodist University (SMU) in Dallas, which was known for graduating corporate attorneys and in-house counsel. “I had no desire to be a trial lawyer,” he says. “I wanted very specifically to be involved in a company, working hand-in-hand with the business. I learned that from working in my mother’s small in-home health-care business.”

Shortly after graduating from SMU in 1995, Tollison moved back to Albuquerque, where he took a job with a large health-care company as director of contracts and compliance. Although he lived in New Mexico, he took the Arizona bar exam in 1997, which allowed him to accept a position as contracts attorney with another health-care company—Phoenix-based Banner Health, which owns and operates 23 hospitals and health-care facilities across the United States—in 1999, further developing his niche in contracts and compliance.

That niche is what attracted Phoenix-based U-Haul, according to Tollison, who gave a presentation to the local business community in 2001 on the topic of health-care regulations. The presentation, he believes, caught the attention of an executive in U-Haul’s marketing division. “I received a call from the executive vice president of U-Haul and she told me about a position,” Tollison says. “She said, ‘Part of my division is the marketing group, which is the largest division of U-Haul. We have 12 attorneys here at U-Haul and all they do is litigation, litigation, litigation. We need somebody who will physically work with us and our team, separated from the legal department, to help us with the following: contracts, compliance, marketing, intellectual property, and anything else we give you.’”

MEMORABLE MILESTONES

Summer
1984

●

JOINS MOTHER'S BUSINESS

Tollison decides to become an in-house attorney when he sees how badly his mother needed one to help her with the in-home health-care company she'd started in 1981.

August
1992

●

ATTENDS SMU

Tollison is accepted into Southern Methodist University in Dallas, which is known for graduating corporate attorneys. He joins All Season's Home Care Inc. four years later as director of contracts and compliance, commencing his contracts and compliance specialty.

May
1997

●

PASSES ARIZONA BAR EXAM

Taking the Arizona bar exam as a New Mexico resident positions Tollison for future opportunities in Phoenix—home to his next two employers.

January
1999

●

JOINS BANNER HEALTH

As contracts attorney at Banner Health, where eventually he was promoted to assistant director of compliance and research contracts attorney, Tollison delivers a lecture on health-care regulations to the local business community.

November
2000

●

RECRUITED BY U-HAUL

U-Haul hires Tollison as marketing staff attorney and later promotes him to senior assistant general counsel in its marketing group, affording him the opportunity to contribute to a company as a member of its business-strategy team.

October
2010

●

NAMED REGIONAL PRESIDENT OF HNBA

As a regional president of the Hispanic National Bar Association, Tollison works hard to develop Hispanic attorneys by helping them network with prospective clients.

It was exactly what Tollison had envisioned when he decided to become an in-house attorney. “My offices were next door to the president and the project managers and vice presidents and directors,” says Tollison, who was hired as marketing staff attorney and later promoted to senior assistant general counsel. “I was not physically in the legal department and I was not a member of the legal department. I was a member of the business team.”

Although he's remained a member of that business team for the past 11 years, and continues to be its lead counsel, Tollison now serves the legal department, as well, and assists U-Haul with everything from offensive litigation, business contracts, and trademark disputes to land zoning issues, international business agreements, and marketing strategy. “What I like about U-Haul is that they really do trust you, and they put a lot of responsibility on you,” Tollison says. “There's not a lot of micromanagement. They give you big goals and tasks, and they say, ‘Go get it done.’ That's how I've always worked. Growing up in a small business with my mother, we didn't have a lot of resources. You just had to figure it out. Even though U-Haul is this big-monster company, there's still that small-business spirit. I appreciate that.”

While he awaits the next chapter of his career, Tollison is committed to giving back to the Hispanic community. A regional president for the Hispanic National Bar Association, he is a volunteer for several nonprofits and a mentor for Hispanic attorneys. Of course, the most important person he's helped is his mother, who finally had the benefit of legal counsel when her son passed the bar exam. “I basically became her unpaid in-house attorney,” Tollison says. “She was really grateful for that.”

LAW

[Share This Story](#) | [Facebook](#) [Twitter](#) [Email](#) [Print](#) [+1](#) [0](#)

QUICK LINKS

Download Media Kit:

[English Version](#)

[Spanish Version](#)

To Advertise:

E-mail Titus Dawson

(312) 256-8462

For Editorial Consideration:

E-mail Jeff Powell

(312) 447-2368

Available on the
App Store

NEWS

We're hiring! HE is seeking an extraordinary sales executive to join our dynamic, growing team of media professionals in the position of Business Development Manager. Learn more [here](#).

Experience *Hispanic Executive*

like never before with our all-new tablet edition, featuring expanded, interactive content on the most innovative media platform in decades. Click on the image below to be directed to the App Store download page.



SOCIAL LINKS



LATEST TWEETS

- @Cigna's chief diversity officer, Rosanna Durruthy, shares with us her unusual climb to the top in our latest issue! <http://t.co/OQc7YbPr>
- Committed to highlighting standout MBA candidates & recent graduates from business schools across country, meet Ingrid: <http://t.co/zftES4KN>
- RT @Alltop_Latism: Latinos in Social Media – 10 Things To Know About Latinos in Social Media – #LATISM <http://t.co/G1KVRhWQ> #redesh... h ...

INDUSTRY PARTNERS

NCLR
NATIONAL COUNCIL OF LA RAZA



**NATIONAL
HISPANA
LEADERSHIP
INSTITUTE**

HITEC
Hispanic IT Executive Council