

# CRAIN'S

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CHICAGOBUSINESS.COM | NOVEMBER 2, 2009

*Geoffrey Richards*

**40 UNDER 40 09**

**38 \* Principal \* Head, Special Situations & Restructuring Group \* William Blair & Company \* Chicago**

Geoffrey Richards is one chiseled workout guy. He once dated Desiree Rogers, now White House social secretary, and is pals with Johnson Publishing Co. CEO Linda Johnson Rice.

“Chicks dig him, and that’s not true for everyone in our business,” says Mark Thomas, a Chicago bankruptcy attorney.

Professionally, Mr. Richards is focused on bulking up William Blair’s fledgling Special Situations & Restructuring boutique, where he landed in 2007 after six years as a bankruptcy attorney at Kirkland & Ellis LLP and another year at Giuliani Capital Advisors LLC in New York.

Blair is better known for money management and for middle-market corporate finance and M&A services. It scored a coup this year, advising the London-based firm that bought Chicago icon Hartmarx Corp. out of bankruptcy for \$130 million. “Blair had done restructurings more by default than by design before I joined them,” Mr. Richards says.

He’ll need his networking skills to body-build a broader restructuring practice in competition with much-larger and more-specialized firms. For a start, five of his group’s 24 deals over the last two years involved international transactions, he says.

“I always thought he was kind of wasted at Kirkland—they didn’t need his (ability to generate) business,” says Fruman Jacobson, a Sonnenschein Nath & Rosenthal LLP bankruptcy partner and adviser to Blair. “I think where Blair can excel is in the out-of-court stuff—they can do swaps, they can do exchange offers, they can bring in foreign capital.”

Mr. Richards went to a coat-and-tie boarding school in Pennsylvania, where he started assembling his Rolodex. “He’s a real gentleman in a kind of Wild West business,” says Chicago bankruptcy lawyer David Heller, citing handwritten birthday greetings Mr. Richards drops to colleagues’ children.



Photo by: Erik Unger

**SOMETHING GOOD:**

Amid the distress, “I think William Blair has been singularly responsible for saving thousands of jobs,” he contends—1,500 at Hartmarx and about 100 at Crownline Boats Inc. of Downstate West Frankfort, another distressed Blair client.

*Steven R. Strahler*

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