



BOND BUYER

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MINORITY-OWNED FIRMS: Blaylock Robert Van Hires Aquacena Lopez

By Jack Herman

Blaylock Robert Van LLC, an Oakland-based investment bank and financial services company, has hired public finance veteran Aquacena Lopez to lead the planned expansion of its municipal finance business, the minority-owned firm announced.

Lopez joins Blaylock Robert Van from A. Lopez & Associates, where she was founder and co-president. Previously she worked at Vogel Lopez & Associates, where she was a principal and co-founder, and KNN Public Finance.

Lopez has an undergraduate degree from the University of San Francisco and an MBA from the Haas School of Business at the University of California, Berkeley.

"Before we pressed and decided to make a really effort in the municipal business, I had always been of the mindset that I needed someone that really knows their way around the business," president Eric Standifer said in an interview. "I had known Acqucena for a couple years and she was running a very successful financial advisory entity right next door, and when she decided she wanted to do something different on this side of the business, that's when we really felt like we would make a go of it."

Blaylock Robert Van plans to expand into the municipal market with hires and acquisitions of other firms. Previously, it had maintained a more limited role in the market, mainly co-managing and working in selling groups for issuers in California and a few other states.

The firm believes the pullback of some of the market's largest firms has created opportunities for local and minority-owned firms, Standifer said. It also believes legislation in Congress to help issuers offers new openings.

The firm's background in corporate debt, for instance, will assist it as issuers take advantage of stimulus provisions and issue taxable Build America Bonds. "It's the perfect combination," Lopez said. "I know how to structure bonds, and they know how to sell them."

Blaylock Robert Van was formed through the combination of two minority-owned firms - Robert Van Securities and Blaylock & Co. Standifer founded Robert Van in 1991 with a focus on agency trading and equity research, for which it developed a proprietary model historically focused on corporate underwriting.