

Wells Fargo will have to spend between \$5 million and \$10 million to meet the short-term provisions of the Americans With Disabilities Act, according to Gail Abel, who is coordinating the bank's statewide compliance.

Wells is probably better prepared than most for tomorrow's ADA deadline requiring all "readily-achievable" adjustments be made to provide public access for people with handicaps. "We've been making our services and facilities accessible to the handicapped long before we were required to do so by law," said Abel. "We've lowered ATMs at about 500 of our 600 branches, built wheelchair ramps, provided equipment for the hearing impaired and ATM braille pads for the visually impaired."

The trouble is the ATMs are a bit higher, the ramps a bit steeper and the bank's doorways and teller lines slightly narrower than what ADA has mandated. All must be changed.

A Wells staffer for eight years and v.p. of employee relations for the past two years, Abel, 43, was named to her new post at the start of the year. Among her qualifications: Her 7-year-old daughter, Kirsten, is physically handicapped.

"This means a lot to me personally and professionally," she said. "I know how difficult it is to get through doors and navigate narrow aisles with a wheelchair."

Since ADA's passage early last year, Wells Fargo has been consulting with its disabled employees and surveying all its public facilities, Abel said. "The branches are our No. 1 priority," she said. "But the law is so sweeping that it affects every area of the bank -- from the branches to the back shop to all the properties we own or manage. Fortunately, the act does not require us to do major remodeling at this time."

ADA's second phase, which becomes effective July 26, deals with employment of the handicapped.

PEACEMAKER

Appeals Court Justice Harry Low, 60, who retired January 1 after a quarter-century on the municipal, superior and appellate benches, didn't stay retired long. He's become one of 170 former judges affiliated with JAMS (Judicial Arbitration & Mediation Services Inc.), the privately held firm that offers a dispute-settling alternative to the nation's clogged and costly court system.

Last year, JAMS' judges presided over 10,000-plus cases in California, Oregon, Washington and Texas, resolving -- in more than 80 percent of the cases -- construction, real estate, banking, product liability, personal injury and wrongful termination disputes. The 16-office, Southern California-based organization, founded in 1979, will be expanding to New York in a couple of months.

"We have to do something to reduce the cost of litigation and speed up the judicial process," said Low. "JAMS provides a nice transition for retired judges to continue their activities in the private sector."

A longtime advocate of out-of-court mediation, Low played a key role in settling a bitter 1990 feud among board members at San Francisco's Chinese Hospital.

Jay Welsh, 51, of JAMS' San Francisco office said Low will be part of its 41-judge Northern California roster.

LOW-COST LAW

Elsewhere on the legal front, Jim Rockett, 47, who's headed First Interstate Bank's Northern California legal affairs dept. for the past 16 years, is taking charge of an expanded banking and financial services group at S.F.'s 160-lawyer, four-office Ropers Majeski law firm.

One of the things that attracted him, Rockett said, was the 43-year-old, \$43-million-a-year South of Market

firm's ``cost consciousness."

``We're able to offer our banking services at a substantially lower rate than our big-firm competitors," he said. Specifically: ``Less than \$200 an hour, versus the standard \$300 to \$350 an hour."

Among Rockett's fellow Ropers Majeski partners: Former Appellate Court Judge, U.S. Ambassador to Ireland and Chronicle (summer of '46) copy boy, Bob Kane, 65.

TOP OLIVE

Giurlani USA, the close-to-\$50-million-a-year Campbell marketer of Star olive oil and other specialty food products, has a new president: Frank Morgan, 48, former v.p. of international sales and marketing for Dole's dried fruit and nut division in Fresno. He succeeds retiring Hank Orsi, 68, who been has been with the company 30 years.

Giurlani, which dates back to 1898, is owned by Spain's Elosua S.A., the world's largest olive oil marketer.

MOVING ON

Orrick Herrington & Sutcliffe Partner John Seegal, 45, has a new assignment: Building the law firm's corporate practice in Sacramento. Chair of Orrick's M&A group, Seegal will maintain offices in both S.F. and Sacramento . . . After seven years as an independent member of the Pacific Stock Exchange, Stephen Papale, 38, has signed on as a high-net-worth money manager for Shearson Lehman. His identical twin, David Papale, is a top producer at McGuire Real Estate . . . Ex-3Com marketing exec Steve Pomeroy, 42, has joined ShareData in Sunnyvale as v.p. of sales and marketing.

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