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MELISSA MURO LAMERE ('12)—MASLON LLP
MELVIN WELCH ('07)—WELCH LAW FIRM LLP
KRISTIN ZINSMASTER ('10)—JONES DAY

We celebrate these attorneys who in their first ten years of practice have distinguished themselves professionally and through service to the community.

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Honorees bring us the good news

No matter where you stand on today's issues, it's the end of the summer and we could all use some good news.

Fortunately, Minnesota Lawyer has good news as plentiful as tomatoes in September, and that is the 19 unsung heroes and 23 up and coming lawyers whom we celebrate in this issue.

We're singing the praises of those who keep the paychecks coming, the health insurance premiums paid, the exhibits cataloged and the computers up and humming. They bring the courts to students, the moving vans to the offices, the exhibits to the war room and the bagels to the meetings.

These unsung heroes are important to their colleagues, their clients and their communities. They make the lawyers look good in court and the offices look good all the time. And, even more remarkably, they not only can keep their cyberworlds safe and secure, but they also can speak technology to lawyers.

Our up and coming lawyers also give us reason to celebrate. Adhering to the highest values of the profession, they represent the immigrants and the veterans, the injured and the debtors, and the entrepreneurs and big businesses that keep our economy buzzing.

They represent our hospitals, our doctors, our churches and our children. They help keep us safe and help crime victims heal, and they make our courtrooms safe for the arrested and indicted. They represent employers and employees in a rapidly changing legal environment and the police at a challenging time. They like to compete and debate and they also like to come together and cooperate.

We've said this before but it bears repeating: Up and comers are realistic and idealistic; they are dreamers and doers. We were all like that at one time and if you aren't now, these lawyers will inspire you.

—Barbara L. Jones, editor

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Table of *Contents*



Shannon Bjorklund	8	Kelsey Kelley	19
Shelby Knutson Bruce	9	Joseph Kelly	20
Jamie Buskirk	10	Alyssa Lawson	21
Rob Courtney	11	Melissa Muro LaMere	22
Sam Diehl	12	Andrew Murphy	24
Holly Dolejsi	13	Kristin Berger Parker	25
Ryan Else	14	Brian Rochel	26
Charmaine Harris	15	Erin Sindberg Porter	27
Eikoku Ikeno	16	Carly Stephani	28
Jing Jin	17	Ben Wagner	29
		Melvin Welch	30
		Christina Zauhar	31
		Kristin Zinsmaster	32



UP&COMING
ATTORNEYS

MINNESOTA LAWYER

2017



Shannon Bjorklund



After fewer than eight years as an attorney, Shannon Bjorklund is drawing accolades from colleagues.

Bjorklund, who recently became a partner at Dorsey & Whitney's Minneapolis Trial Group, "has distinguished herself as an exceptional lawyer with a deep commitment to giving back to the profession and community," said Theresa Bevilacqua, a Dorsey colleague.

Bjorklund practices in intellectual property, ERISA, and government public records. She also devotes at least 50 hours a year to pro bono service. In one case, Bjorklund served as lead attorney to three professors who sued U.S. Immigration and Custom Enforcement and gained an unprecedented amount of information

about the criteria for the detention of individuals.

"Shannon's record of success ... and her devotion to client service have already earned her the trust of Dorsey's most demanding clients," Bevilacqua said.

Bjorklund is also a skilled legal writer and regular presenter at CLE programs.

In 2014, Bjorklund won the Burton Award for Distinguished Legal Writing for an article that she co-authored for the American College of Construction Lawyers.

Outside of law, Bjorklund's community service has included tutoring at-risk high school students and starting "Plant an Extra Row," a group that collects and donates extra garden produce to local food pantries.

—Scott Carlson



Shelby Knutson Bruce



From the time when she was a grade school student, Shelby Knutson Bruce knew she wanted to be a lawyer.

“I knew the career would be challenging and engaging,” Bruce told Minnesota Lawyer. Today, she is living her childhood ambition with distinction.

This May, only five years after graduating from law school, Bruce became a trademark counsel at 3M Co., working exclusively on enforcing and protecting the 3M trademark and brands.

Prior to joining 3M, Bruce worked five years at Norton Rose Fulbright in Minneapolis as an attorney on its US Brands Team, where her work included protecting clients’ packaging against trademark infringement and

handling copyrights, social media issues and right of publicity.

At Norton, Bruce became a highly knowledgeable, hard-working “go-to” attorney.

“Shelby advanced in our firm ahead of the normal progression, was highly sought after to assist with work by a large number of partners in multiple offices and was highly respected by numerous clients,” said Andrew Ferraro, spokesman at Norton Rose Fulbright.

Bruce also does pro bono work for some community organizations including Women Venture, a Minneapolis-based nonprofit serving female entrepreneurs.

Bruce graduated from the Seattle University School of Law summa cum laude in 2012.

—Scott Carlson



Jamie Buskirk



Attorney Jamie Buskirk has taken the health care mergers and acquisitions world by storm since joining Lindquist & Vennum in 2015.

“Jamie has already participated in several high-profile transactions that have generated significant results for our clients in the past two years,” said Dennis O’Malley, managing partner. “She has also served as the primary attorney on more than 10 health care practice acquisitions.”

Buskirk, an associate who focuses on transactional and regulatory law in the health care field, said, “In a specialized field like health care, I can make a contribution right away.”

Buskirk’s transactions include representing Livio

Health Group, a start-up company, in closing an early-stage funding deal with Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota. She also has assisted St. Cloud-based CentraCare in assembling a new nonprofit health system with Rice Memorial Hospital and physicians group ACMC Health. Buskirk also assisted a Lindquist team representing Winnebago Industries in its \$500 million buyout of Grand Design RV.

During the past two years, the Minnesota State Bar Association has named Buskirk as a “North Star Lawyer” for devoting at least 50 hours annually of pro bono service to low-income residents.

Buskirk earned her juris doctor degree magna cum laude from the University of Minnesota.

—Scott Carlson



Rob Courtney



Rob Courtney, a principal at Fish & Richardson, is a “triple threat” in handling patent-infringement disputes for his clients, who include some of the world’s largest technology companies.

Courtney’s dossier includes extensive litigating before federal courts, the International Trade Commission and the Patent Trial and Appeal Board, explained law firm spokeswoman Rob-in Chance. In the process, Courtney has become a top litigator with many major wins since joining Fish & Richardson in 2006, she said.

One of those victories occurred last year for Cutsforth Inc., where the Federal Circuit reversed two rulings that had declared the company’s intellectual

property claims unpatentable. Cutsforth’s win enabled it to proceed with its infringement claims against MotivePower Inc. over the manufacture and sale of removable brush holders.

“That was a new path in the area [of the law],” marking the first full reversal of an IPR decision of non-patentability, Courtney said. “We were very proud of that.”

Courtney said he decided to pursue patent law after working at the Center for Democracy & Technology, where he was exposed to how new commercial ideas get protected and guided into the public arena. He earned his J.D. from Stanford School of Law.

—*Scott Carlson*



Sam Diehl



Minneapolis attorney Sam Diehl has distinguished himself handling First Amendment litigation for Twin Cities area churches.

“I care deeply about religious liberty,” said Diehl, who primarily practices employment law.

Just two years after graduating from law school, Diehl represented the Unitarian Universalist Church of Minnetonka in 2009 against the city of Wayzata. The church wanted to erect a new building; the city initially denied the church’s request, citing neighborhood concerns about noise.

Diehl contended Wayzata’s denial abridged the church’s First Amendment rights. Two years of fierce litigation quickly ended when a federal judge granted the church’s motion for summary judgment. Wayzata

settled the case, agreeing to the church’s demands and paying \$500,000 in damages.

Meanwhile, in May, a federal judge ruled the city of St. Michael’s zoning ordinance violated the First Amendment free speech rights of Diehl’s client, the Riverside Church, which wanted to convert a former movie theater complex into a new worship center. After a lengthy bench trial, the judge awarded the church \$1.3 million in damages plus attorney fees.

Colleague Loren Hansen said these types of cases illustrate that “Sam has taken the initiative to go above and beyond and advocate for issues important to him and the community at large.”

—*Scott Carlson*



Holly Dolejsi



Attorney Holly Dolejsi enjoys representing plaintiffs in mass tort cases against some of the nation's largest medical device and pharmaceutical companies.

"It is like a neighbor taking on Goliath," Dolejsi said of her job. "I like to help clients gain compensation for their injuries. It is through the legal system that the playing field is leveled."

Since 2011, Dolejsi has participated in several major cases litigated by Robins Kaplan's Mass Tort group, often assuming leadership roles in them.

In July, Dolejsi was named co-lead counsel in the Farxiga multidistrict litigation, an appointment she won after successfully arguing to a panel of seven fed-

eral judges to create the MDL. That kind of honor is rare for such a young attorney, said Tara Sutton, head of Robins' Mass Tort group.

Dolejsi also was co-lead counsel in the Stryker Rejuvenate/ABG II modular hip litigation. "It is all about you ... becoming indispensable so that people want to work with you," Dolejsi said.

Besides her regular practice, Dolejsi is active in several lawyer organizations including the Minnesota Association for Justice and Public Justice, a national public interest law firm.

Dolejsi earned her J.D. from William Mitchell College of Law in 2009.

—Scott Carlson



Ryan Else



Ryan Else, a combat veteran himself, is passionate about defending veterans in criminal cases, helping them to “hit reset” and get back on their feet while dealing with underlying physical, mental and adjustment problems of returning to civilian life.

One way of doing that is getting them into veterans treatment courts, where they have to keep up with demanding regimens that may lead to dismissal of their charges or avoidance of jail time, Else says.

“I want to see that [veterans] get honor and respect even when they’re not in their finest hour,” he says. He graduated from the University of St. Thomas School of Law in 2011 and went to work with the Brockton D.

Hunter P.A. law firm. He and Hunter co-edited an 800-page resource book, “The Attorney’s Guide to Defending Veterans in Criminal Court,” and speak nationally on the topic.

Else is executive director of the non-profit Veterans Defense Project, which recently received a two-year Minnesota state grant totaling \$500,000 to print more copies of the resource book and to increase the number of veterans treatment courts from seven currently.

Hunter, also a veteran, says, “Ryan has a warrior’s heart, a razor-sharp intellect and a caring soul. He is the ultimate legal ‘battle buddy’ and we would be lost without him.”

—Betsy Carlson



Charmaine Harris



Charmaine Harris is a second-career attorney whose training and experience as a mechanical engineer dovetail into her practice in the areas of medical-device, products-liability defense and other complex litigation.

At Blackwell Burke P.A., she is a lead associate for a Fortune 500 company defending product-liability and premises-liability claims arising in state and federal courts nationwide.

“This in itself is an unusual level of responsibility for a young attorney and a testament to Charmaine’s consistently great work product, solid writing ability, and thoroughness,” says colleague Spiwe Jefferson. “Her issue-spotting skills are outstanding, she is passion-

ate about our clients and results, and inspires trust with her dependability.”

Harris also is on the science team for her firm, which is defending a client in a multidistrict litigation case involving the Bair Hugger patient warming device used during surgeries.

Before she started practicing law in 2012, Harris was a senior medical design engineer at Medtronic designing, testing and improving spinal cord stimulation devices. She is named an inventor on five patents for these devices.

Harris got her law degree at William Mitchell College of Law. She is on the Board of Directors of the Minnesota Association of Black Lawyers

—Betsy Carlson



Eikoku Ikeno



Eikoku Ikeno, one of three staff attorneys at the Children's Law Center of Minnesota, calls his work advocating for abandoned, abused or neglected children his dream job. It's why he went to law school.

He graduated from the University of Minnesota Law School in 2014 and joined the Children's Law Center in April 2016. Since then, he has worked with the center's staff attorneys and volunteer attorneys representing more than 720 foster care youths.

"Eikoku is an impressive addition to CLC's stalwart staff of child advocates," says the center's managing attorney, Anne Tyler Gueinzus. "CLC staff and our child

clients are indebted to Eikoku and his ferocious work on their behalf."

Ikeno says he always wanted to help kids and first heard about child advocacy as an undergraduate on a university YMCA social justice trip to Colorado to study child abuse.

The group visited the Rocky Mountain Children's Law Center, where he heard its founder, Shari F. Shink, say she wished lawyers would be willing to spend as much time representing children as they did big companies.

"She planted a seed," he says. It struck a chord with him that speaking for children could be a career option.

—Betsy Carlson



Jing Jin



In just two years at the Briggs & Morgan firm, Jing Jin has impressed colleagues and clients alike with her keen understanding of commercial finance. Jing comes by that knowledge thanks to a background that includes time as vice president of research and projects development for a Hong Kong investment fund — before she even attended law school.

Before coming to Briggs, she served as a paralegal in the Hong Kong office of an AmLaw 100 San Francisco-based firm, focusing on initial public offerings of mainland Chinese companies on the Hong Kong Stock Exchange.

“Financial products can be very simple, like loans, and they can be extremely complex transactions,” Jin

said. “I found it interesting to learn about the wide variety of things they can do. They can be used in a bad way, as we found out during the mortgage crisis, and they can be used to really help people. They build companies and communities.”

Jing enjoys the fast-paced nature and international scope of finance law.

“Dodd-Frank was coming into effect around the time I graduated law school, and since then we’ve seen changes to it,” she said. “There’s always a lot of legal change in the financial world. The day-to-day practice of financial law is very exciting. The pace never slows down.”

—Betsy Carlson

Congratulations Jing Jin

UP & COMING ATTORNEY



Jing Jin
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Thanks, Jing, for your leadership in the field and commitment to the community.

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Kelsey Kelley



For Kelsey Kelley, there was never much doubt that she was going to practice law in the public sector. After clerking at the Minnesota Court of Appeals for now-Justice Margaret Chutich, Kelley went straight to the Anoka County Attorney's office and has never looked back.

"I knew even going into law school that I wanted to do public service," Kelley said. "I liked the idea of serving the community and being in the position of not serving a specific client, but keeping a broad perspective."

Kelley understands that she could probably earn more with a private-sector practice, but she would

much rather devote her energy to protecting the interest of the county and state and its citizens.

Colleagues describe Kelley as "scary smart" and point to her writing skill as a key part of her arsenal. Kelley says it's gratifying to bring her skills to bear in a criminal appellate case. It can also be gratifying to help the family of a murder victim gain some peace via an affirmed conviction, as she did in *State v. Lilienthal*.

"I like going through a record and putting the puzzle pieces together," she said. "I love researching and writing, and it's rewarding to make a novel argument in the appellate court."

—Dan Heilman



Joseph Kelly



Joseph Kelly represented a veteran who was fired by the city of Hopkins, reinstated after a veteran's preference hearing, and was sued by the city for \$66,000 for the costs of the hearing. The city lost that case in the end, and Kelly went to the Capitol.

Minn. Stat. sec. 197.46 now provides that the employer pays all costs associated with the hearing, and, if the veteran prevails, his or her attorney fees.

Kelly's dedication to the rights of veterans comes naturally as a result of his own Army National Guard service, including a 2016 deployment in the North Sinai Desert. He wants to improve the hiring process for

veterans and make them a protected class. This is necessary, Kelly says, because public employers are reluctant to hire veterans because they perceive they can't fire them. "These veterans are continuing their public service by working in the public sector," Kelly says.

Kelly also prosecutes for multiple cities in Ramsey County and represents unions in labor issues, arbitrations and mediations. He also represents police officers in disciplinary proceedings.

He recently received a General Douglas MacArthur Leadership Award in recognition of the ideals of duty, honor and country. In true military fashion, he says, "My subordinates are the reason I got the award."

—Barbara L. Jones



Alyssa Lawson



Alyssa Lawson took awhile to find her niche in law, but once she did there was no doubt about it. After studying political science and philosophy as an undergrad, she began law school with a focus on international law. But a professor who had spent decades as a patent litigator steered her toward intellectual property law.

“A lot of classmates were studying intellectual property law, too, and eventually I fell in love with patent litigation,” Lawson said.

She ended up transferring to the University of California-Berkeley and while pursuing a law and technology certificate, worked for Berkeley Technology Law Journal.

“Technology and law are both constantly changing,”

she said. “I mostly represent defendants – companies getting sued over patents that probably shouldn’t have been issued.”

While at Robins, she has represented Minneapolis-based Code42 Software in four patent infringement matters relating to its end-point data protection plan, with all four cases settling.

She also represented Unifrax in a patent infringement case relating to its aircraft flame barrier, and even though the jury decided against her client in that case (which is now post-trial briefing), Lawson found the experience gratifying.

“I learn something from every case I work on,” she said.

—Dan Heilman



Melissa Muro LaMere



In five years of practice, Melissa Muro LaMere has reached milestones many attorneys are still dreaming of at that point in their careers. She has proven to be a skilled litigator and has shown equal acumen representing pro bono clients in matters related to gender equity and diversity.

She found her way to her noncompete law practice area partially as a result of Maslon's practice of joining new associates with a variety of partners in order to expose them to numerous areas of the law.

"I was able to work on a noncompete matter when I was a first-year associate, and it just clicked," LaMere

said. "I loved the team and I loved that area of law."

Working on matters involving noncompetition agreements, trade secrets, business torts and unfair competition and trade practices, LaMere works with global leading companies to protect their business assets.

Her extensive pro bono work includes her current representation of the ACLU of Minnesota as it seeks the release of all video evidence related to the 2016 killing of Philando Castile by a St. Anthony police officer.

"Those are important matters that I'm glad to give my time to," Muro LaMere's.

—Dan Heilman



Congratulations to Melissa Muro LaMere: Up & Coming Attorney

Melissa is an exceptional lawyer, as well as our respected colleague and friend. Her **leadership**, **dedication to clients**, and **engagement with advancing diversity in the profession** are qualities we hold dear at Maslon. We are extremely proud of all of Melissa's achievements and congratulate her on this well-deserved recognition as a *Minnesota Lawyer* **2017 Up & Coming Attorney**.

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Andrew Murphy



In his first decade of practice, Andrew Murphy has not only achieved partner status at the Twin Cities' largest law firm, but he has also established himself as a regional leader in labor and employment law.

Murphy focuses on class and collective actions, with expertise and experience in Fair Labor Standards Act collective-action litigation, matters involving alleged independent contractor misclassification and cases involving joint employment and agency liability claims.

Murphy credits Faegre counsel D. Lucetta Pope with steering him toward his successful practice area when he was a junior associate, enriching his budding practice with knowledge of class- and collective-action litigation.

"She helped me to really understand how to think through complex problems and write and express your position to the court," Murphy said. "I got involved in class-action cases with our employment team and have been doing that ever since."

Among numerous successful cases, Murphy pointed with pride to a complex race-discrimination case in which he represented the nationally known employer.

"We were able to pre-emptively move to deny class certification, which is something you don't see very frequently," he said. "We were able to defeat the class by going on the offensive early on. We achieved success for our client on a much faster time scale than we could have hoped for."

—Dan Heilman



Kristin Berger Parker

Kristin Berger Parker takes a holistic approach to her practice of employment law.

As an experienced labor and employment practitioner, Parker takes a nuanced view, reminding employers that good employee relations can help them advance their business objectives.

“You shouldn’t look at human relations and human resources as separate and competing with your business goals,” Parker said. “Instead, I try to focus on how clients can meet compliance obligations in a way that’s compatible with where the business is going, and how to foster relations with employees in a way that furthers business goals and gives people the right incentives.”



Parker, a partner at Stinson Leonard Street who joined the firm in 2008, often works with health care and technology companies including hospitals and medical device companies. Other clients include manufacturers and service industry businesses.

Parker’s work to master technical details is an advantage in non-competition matters. “Oftentimes those kinds of cases pop up very fast,” said Parker, a graduate of Northwestern University School of Law. “It can be a really intense process.”

Parker’s community involvement includes serving on the board of WATCH-MN, a court monitoring and judicial policy nonprofit.

—Todd Nelson



Brian Rochel



Brian Rochel enjoys the “theater of litigation.” But representing employees in retaliation, whistleblower, wrongful-termination and other employment cases has a deeper meaning for him.

“The ability to be involved in trial and appellate work and Supreme Court-level work ... that helps individual clients and communities and society as a whole were the two big interests I had and they coalesced quite well in representing employees,” Rochel said.

His courtroom results include a \$361,000 award in a court trial in favor of a disabled employee and a \$360,000 jury verdict in a retaliation claim.

Rochel, a partner at Teske, Micko, Katz, Kitzer &

Rochel since 2014, began his legal career in 2010 after graduating from what is now Mitchell Hamline School of Law, where he also is an adjunct faculty member.

Rochel is vice president of the Minnesota chapter of the National Employment Lawyers Association, a board member of the Federal Bar Association’s (FBA) Young Lawyers Division and co-chair of the FBA Labor & Employment Section’s Publications and Public Relations Committee.

“The passion to try to help people drives wanting to get involved more in the community as well as through leadership positions,” Rochel said.

—Todd Nelson



Erin Sindberg Porter



Working and communicating well with others — even opposing counsel — is a key to Erin Sindberg Porter’s legal practice.

It’s particularly important in her role as a lead lawyer on two coordinated, consolidated cases involving complex issues in multiple jurisdictions, she said.

In one, Sindberg Porter, an attorney at Greene Espel since 2008, represents several mortgage companies, and in the other a large international corporation.

“Building good relations with people whether they’re on the same side of the ‘v.’ or on the other side of the ‘v.’ is critical to making sure that you can keep your case progressing,” Sindberg Porter said. “I find it to

be much more productive to find some common ground and work from there.”

Sindberg Porter, a graduate of what is now Mitchell Hamline School of Law, focuses on civil and commercial litigation and has a white-collar criminal defense and investigations practice.

A founding member of the Minnesota Mother Attorneys Association, Sindberg Porter has two young sons. “Being in private practice is not easy,” she said. “It’s not easy when you’re married and when you have young kids. It was important in founding the organization to support and connect with other women on this journey.”

—Todd Nelson



Carly Stephani



Some might avoid sifting through fire or property damage scenes, but not Carly Stephani.

For Stephani, it's necessary to understand the scientific and engineering principles involved in representing motor vehicle, medical device and other manufacturers in her national product liability defense practice.

"Clients trust me to be the first attorney on their behalf to dig into the facts of the case," Stephani said. "For me that level of trust that's signified makes it feel like it's high-level work even if somebody else thinks it's grunt work."

A 2011 graduate of the University of St. Thomas

School of Law, Stephani, now an associate at Bowman and Brooke, was an intern when her work with a team handling claims involving an off-road vehicle manufacturer earned her a permanent position.

At first being in law school without having a family connection to the profession intimidated Stephani.

"You don't have to come from a lawyering family, you don't have to come from a fancy background to excel in this profession," she said. "That's something I try to remind law students of when I speak to them."

Stephani is a board member of Face to Face, a non-profit that offers programs for homeless youth.

—Todd Nelson



Ben Wagner



Ben Wagner got an early start on his legal career.

"My dad would tell you I was probably born a lawyer," Wagner said. "I've been arguing with him since the age of 3. Maybe 4."

Although Wagner didn't officially begin practicing until 2008, he has hardly slowed down since.

In less than a decade Wagner has become a partner at Regan Tax Law in Bloomington, chaired the Minnesota State Bar Association's Tax Law Committee, been published numerous times and speaks frequently on tax issues.

Working with clients who have received "nastygrams" from the Internal Revenue Service or the state

Department of Revenue "is something that comes easier to me," said Wagner, a graduate of what now is Mitchell Hamline School of Law.

"Clients are often stressed out when we first meet," Wagner said, "I enjoy working with them to reach a favorable resolution that allows them to move on."

Wagner has volunteered for the past 12 years with the YMCA Twin Cities' Youth in Government program, helping high school students run a mock supreme court. He also serves at the Minnesota Assistance Council for Veterans' free monthly legal clinics and its annual StandDown event for homeless veterans.

—Todd Nelson



Melvin Welch



At 6 feet 4 inches and 235 pounds, Melvin Welch cuts an imposing figure. That can be both an advantage and a disadvantage in the courtroom, particularly for someone naturally inclined to excitability when fighting injustice. But Welch has learned to make his size work for him.

“You have to be congenial; otherwise you’re seen as oppressive and tyrannical,” Welch says. “But you can use that size to cultivate the ethos of authority.”

A U.S. Navy veteran who once worked as a translator during NATO’s Kosovo peacekeeping mission, Welch started practicing law in 2007. First he was a state pub-

lic defender and later he launched St. Paul-based Welch Law Firm.

He has developed a reputation as a zealous, persistently effective defender who takes time to mentor young attorneys. He is a Minnesota American Indian Bar Association board member and works closely with the University of Minnesota’s alumni student committee and mentorship program. He takes on two or three pro bono cases a year that he says “strike at my sympathy bone.”

He deals mostly with felonies in the state and federal systems and feels most at home with those cases. “It’s so much faster paced,” he said. “And I guess it requires a little bit of inventiveness.”

—Kevin Featherly



Christina Zauhar



Think the Twins are doing well? Meet Christina Zauhar, who has achieved what might be termed a legal grand slam. She has a string of four consecutive complete trial acquittals — not guilty on all counts.

Zauhar, who began practicing law in 2012, also has scored numerous pretrial dismissals on cases ranging from criminal sexual conduct to driving while impaired. She takes great pride in that record because to her it means she has successfully defended individuals' constitutional rights against government overreach.

A contributing author to Minnesota's DWI Deskbook, Zauhar is an active member of Minnesota Women Lawyers and the Minnesota Association of Crimi-

nal Defense Lawyers.

She volunteers at her alma mater each semester, presenting in-panel discussions, judging moot court and conducting informational interviews. She has made firm-wide fundraising for Special Olympics Minnesota an annual tradition at her law firm.

Zauhar grew up in Duluth, steeped in the legal process. Her mom was a career sheriff's deputy, her dad a police detective. But the Hamline University Law School grad thinks her zeal for criminal defense developed while clerking for Halberg Criminal Defense, where she now works as an attorney.

"I want to do criminal defense my whole career," she said. "I am in love with it."

—Kevin Featherly



Kristin Zinsmaster



Kristin Zinsmaster doesn't shrink from the adjective "ambitious." That's good. Because it describes an attorney whose list of accomplishments far exceeds the space allotted here.

Here's a sample: She earned a 4.0 GPA and summa cum laude distinction as a University of Minnesota-Duluth undergrad. In 2010, she finished fifth in her University of Minnesota Law School class and was editor-in-chief of the Minnesota Law Review. She clerked for 8th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals Judge James B. Loken before joining Dorsey and Whitney and, later, Jones Day. Intimidated yet?

These days, she specializes in investigations and

white-collar crime. She is a prolific trial attorney, yet much of her work flies under the radar. In internal corporate investigations, she said, the object is to avoid indictments.

Zinsmaster is not one to rest on her laurels — or, apparently, to rest at all. She won the North Star Award from the Minnesota Bar Association for offering more than 50 hours per year of pro bono work and is an active volunteer for organizations like the Children's Law Center.

Suffice it to say Zinsmaster thrives in competitive environments. "The thing I like most about investigations is that the stakes are high," she said. "I like being part of the team that helps people through that."

—Kevin Featherly



2017

MINNESOTA LAWYER

UnsungHeroes
Legal

Table of Contents



Theresa Anderson and Rebecca Baertsch	35
Tom Bangasser	36
Ken Bieber	38
Jamie Blomquist	39
Emily Conde	40
Matthew Fordyce	41
Shannon Frost	42
Leslie Frye	43

Sue Hartinger	44
Jessica Heck	45
Amanda Johnson	46
Bonnie Korte	47
David Oxley	48
Maria Patino	50
Sheri Peterson	51
Sandi Poppen	52
Kia Schmeckpeper	53
Kelly Thaemert	54



Theresa Anderson and Rebecca Baertsch



Hundreds of diverse Twin Cities high school students know about opportunities to work in the federal justice system, thanks to Rebecca Baertsch and Theresa Anderson.

The judicial assistants to Judge Donovan Frank and Magistrate Judge Franklin Noel, respectively, have coordinated the Minnesota version of the Open Doors to Federal Courts for the past 18 years. Baertsch organized and ran the program for its first 14 years, staging mock trials and job fairs in the courthouse. She recruited diverse volunteers from the FBI, Secret Service, Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms, and other federal justice roles to share their experiences with students.

Baertsch also suggested that Frank tell students about his childhood on a farm and that federal Judge Michael Davis tell them how he was raised by a single mother.

"It was to give them hope and some expectations to dream," Frank said.

Noel took over Davis' responsibilities for the program three years ago and asked for Anderson's help.

"She basically would organize those things, and all I had to do is show up and talk out loud," Noel said.

Anderson began coordinating the program after it moved from the U.S. Courthouse in St. Paul to individual schools in 2014. She takes the court's outreach efforts very seriously, Noel said.

"In this instance, it's high school students and other community people who are interested in learning about what the court does and what opportunities there are within the courts," he said.

Frank met Baertsch while he served on the Minnesota Supreme Court Task Force on Racial Bias in the Judicial System in the 1990s and she worked as judicial assistant to Minnesota Supreme Court Justice Alan Page. Frank was impressed with her "unusual knowledge of diversity issues and reaching out to the public" and hired her away, with Page's blessing.

Baertsch's work on Open Doors was "above and beyond" her regular duties, according to Frank. "She was for all those years the go-to person, and diversity was always the number one priority," Frank said.

Anderson continues to coordinate Open Doors, although judicial responsibility passed last year to Magistrate Judge Kate Menendez. While Anderson and Baertsch acknowledged all the volunteers, Anderson said more needs to be done.

"As important as it is for the volunteer lawyers go to the classrooms and inspire them, it's equally as important for the law firms and chambers to recruit from a diverse background," she said.

—Nancy Crotti



Tom Bangasser



Tom Bangasser knows how keep office services flowing and how to throw a party.

Bangasser joined Minneapolis law firm Robins Kaplan as front desk coordinator in 2013. He takes in photocopying projects, processes messenger requests and more.

Bangasser also organizes in-office events. He comes in early, stays late, and personally oversees every detail, according to his boss, Alan Freeman, Robins' manager of central services.

In May, the firm named Bangasser events coordinator. One month later, he staged a major occasion outside the office — an all-firm-attorneys event at the Independence, Minnesota, farm of Robins board chair Martin Lueck. That meant renting tents, tables, chairs, etc., and staging an outdoor dinner for 225 guests.

“It was actually very fun to do,” Bangasser said. “I was a little worried because of the size of it, but it went absolutely perfectly.”

Freeman also described Bangasser as a problem solver whose work is consistently excellent.

“He gets along well with everyone he encounters, from the highest and most powerful attorneys at the firm to the folks who support those people,” Freeman said.

Bangasser enjoys the variety in his job.

“Every day there’s something new in my life here at the firm and that’s what keeps me going,” he said. “It is very, very nice.”

—Nancy Crotti

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Ken Bieber



Remodeling an empty office is tough enough. When the remodel involves four floors of a working law firm, that's another story.

Ken Bieber helped pull it off at Winthrop & Weinstine in Minneapolis' Capella Tower. As firm facilities manager, he coordinated moving about 150 attorneys and staff, and some of them multiple times. Bieber also singlehandedly moved the contents of the firm library.

Bieber made sure that attorneys and staff had packed up their offices before the movers came in and had their temporary (and ultimately final) workstations ready for occupancy, with IT intact. Demolition started in late April 2016 and wrapped up in October for the firm's five main floors. The firm also remodeled

half of another floor for its accounting and IT departments, finishing in January 2017.

"We couldn't have operated without Ken keeping everyone able to be in a workable environment," said Bob Olek, the firm's chief operating officer and Bieber's boss.

All told, Bieber wrangled about 400 moves. Not surprisingly for a law firm, he encountered some pushback.

"They would be like, 'It's not a good time for me.' Well, it's never going to be a good time," Bieber said. "You just keep plugging away at it and keep your sense of humor."

—Nancy Crotti



Jamie Blomquist



The Maslon law firm hired Jamie Blomquist four years ago to manage its information technology department. He was so good at it that the Minneapolis firm kept adding to his responsibilities.

Now chief information officer, Blomquist leads the IT, litigation support, records management and information resources (or library) teams. He's a people-person, according to Keiko Sugisaka, chair of Maslon's technology committee.

"He is a good manager of people as well as being able to do project management from a technical standpoint," Sugisaka said. "He can explain technology or software

to people who don't have that background in a way that they can understand. ... He is really good at having a limited budget and being able to work with that. He understands how to prioritize that and get our projects done, looking at the costs and benefits and whatever the options are."

Those skills helped Blomquist to secure buy-in from attorneys and staff on the changes he has instituted.

"The firm's committed to evolving and progressing with new ways of improving efficiency and servicing our clients, so that enables me to put a vision in place and execute toward it," he said.

—Nancy Crotti



Emily Conde



Kurt Williams was kind of miserable when Emily Conde was on maternity leave.

“It stinks” without her, said Williams, Conde’s boss and controller at the Gray Plant Mooty law firm in Minneapolis.

Conde joined the firm’s accounting department nine years ago. She took whatever responsibility came her way, became a certified management accountant, and rose to accounting supervisor.

“No matter what you threw at her, you couldn’t stump her,” Williams said.

When the firm officials decided to switch to a new expense-reporting software, they knew whom to put in charge. Conde worked with the software vendor, ran

department meetings, and oversaw implementation all the way through employee training.

Conde “rode herd” on everyone to keep the project on track, but “in a nice way,” Williams said.

“Everybody likes her. They wanted to do well for her. She was the one who made sure everything got done right and involved the right people to get it done.”

Conde appreciated the firm’s cooperation and patience with the software switch, which was a first for her as well. She also likes running the accounting department.

“Everybody works together and helps each other out,” she said. “Everyone’s willing to accept new ideas and try new things and work together.”

—Nancy Crotti



Matthew Fordyce



For years, Matthew Fordyce spent his summers working for his father's construction business. But after a while, he got the itch to go in another direction.

"I kind of stumbled into the notion of getting my paralegal certificate after thinking about it for a while," Fordyce said. "I'm glad I did it."

Attorneys at Bowman and Brooke say working with Fordyce is like working with a partner. They point to his knack for navigating trial and litigation practice support technology and his proficiency with electronic case-management tools as the keys to being

much more than the guy who lugs files into the courtroom.

Fordyce accomplishes this by thinking like a lawyer: In each case he's worked on, he has set up a war room, has all exhibits ready to go and has worked with Bowman's experts and fact witnesses to get them ready for trial. He's worked as litigation support for the firm on half a dozen cases in just over a year, everywhere from Buffalo, Minnesota, to Baltimore.

"My favorite part of the job is my co-workers and the trust they put in me," said Fordyce. "The firm gives me a lot of responsibility and flexibility."

—Dan Heilman



Shannon Frost



Bloomington-based Villaume & Schiek specializes in helping folks in trouble: the injured, the wrongfully terminated, those seeking a divorce, people in need of criminal defense.

As a four-lawyer shop, the firm must run lean in order to provide value for its clients, and that's where legal assistant Shannon Frost comes in. Usually, Minnesota Lawyer's Unsung Legal Heroes are nominated by a supervisor, mentor or colleague. In Frost's case, though, the nomination came from a client.

The origin was an ongoing whistleblower case having to do with the Americans With Disabilities Act. The plaintiff in the case, Villaume & Schiek's client, complained about workplace conditions that didn't

accommodate her disabilities, and claimed that she was retaliated against by being given a new supervisor and being told that she should either get used to the accommodations that were eventually made or else look for other work.

The employer defendant in the case is currently seeking summary judgment to dismiss the plaintiff's claims.

As the primary liaison between the plaintiff and her representation at Villaume & Schiek, Frost was a welcoming and compassionate presence during a stressful time.

"Shannon is intelligent, always professional [and has] a great personality," the plaintiff said. "She is super-efficient and caring."

—Dan Heilman



Leslie Frye



It's said that the reward for a job well done is often being handed more work to do. That's just fine with Dorsey & Whitney Facilities and Conference Center Manager Leslie Frye.

Frye started at Dorsey as a receptionist and quickly moved up the chain to the facilities department, then becoming support services manager.

Her rapid rise was the result of a willingness to take on new tasks when needed. "As people left and retired, I just sort of accumulated their jobs," she said.

Frye is in charge of Dorsey's office facilities — directly in Minneapolis and in coordination with managers in Dorsey's 19 other offices across the United States and internationally. That means dealing with furniture,

art, equipment, supplies, construction and repairs, office moves, office vendors and internal business service operations.

"The fun part is the variety," she said.

"During the course of a day, I get to walk around and meet almost everybody."

A few years ago, Frye helped oversee a massive project that involved consolidating office space that had taken up several floors of Dorsey's downtown Minneapolis space.

"There were a lot of seven-day workweeks," Frye said. "But working with our people and with the moving companies made it go smoothly. It was a very gratifying project."

—Dan Heilman



Sue Hartinger



As an LAA in Stinson Leonard Street's Energy, Environmental, Mining and Transportation division, Sue Hartinger has shown over the years that she's got her own impressive reserves of energy.

She came to Stinson after two decades as a valued legal assistant in private practice and at the state Attorney General's Office. During that time, she often held down second jobs from waitressing to booking clerk for a local police department.

"Sue's career has been exemplified by her energy, outstanding work ethic, strong people and communication skills," said one colleague. "Sue constantly impresses her colleagues by her desire to learn, grow and

expand her skills, her leadership of peer teams, and her dedication to the firms, lawyers and clients for whom she worked."

And rather than chain herself to a single attorney assignment, Hartinger has become known for her willingness to reach out in her workplaces to help out on legal projects and to form and lead project teams.

Hartinger has concerned herself with what the job of LAA will look like after she's retired, prompting colleague efforts to identify their own skills, development needs, schedule requirements and professional goals. With her help, the legal administrative assistants of the future will have a shining example to follow.

—Dan Heilman



Jessica Heck



Jessica Heck spent many years in the resort and hotel industries before she made an important discovery.

“Hotels never close,” she said. “I wanted more regular hours.”

Which isn’t to say that Heck’s current job is a great deal easier than running a hotel. As meeting and event planner for Gray Plant Mooty in Minneapolis, she executes about 100 events every year, including seminars, retreats, anniversary events and webinars.

“The events allow me to work with everybody, from partners to our IT people,” she said. “That makes it fun.”

Last year, Gray Plant Mooty marked its 150th anniversary with a series of events that Heck organized with aplomb.

“She can have a hundred balls in the air and never drop one,” commented one colleague.

That’s not to say that Heck never breaks a sweat. She still shudders when she thinks of the first Gray Plant attorney retreat she organized.

“It was daunting,” she said. “But you have to love it, and I do. You need the ability to foresee what could go wrong before it has a chance to. Then those details become routine. You have to be a planner by nature.”

—Nancy Crotti



Amanda Johnson



The 450-strong Bowman and Brooke has a three-person Human Resources Department, when those jobs are staffed. But in the last year or so, the department lost its director and payroll specialists, leaving Amanda Johnson's plate stacked high. She handled it with grace, taking on the human resources system and the payroll until a replacement could be found and trained. But the payroll is a tough job and it soon became empty again, putting those tasks back on Johnson's plate.

At the same time, the human resources software

needed an upgrade, and you know what that must have been like. As it happened, the new HR software wasn't the right fit for the firm and now they are in another upgrade, which is going well. On the bright side, Johnson said, the firm figured out early that it wouldn't work and now it has a better idea of what is needed.

Some of what it takes to keep employees happy and productive: paychecks, benefits and time off. Johnson is taking care of that for Bowman and Brooke and she's doubtless appreciated every payday.

—Barbara L. Jones



Bonnie Korte



As the manager of patent paralegals at Fish & Richardson, Bonnie Korte has one of the most important jobs in the firm. With responsibility for recruiting, hiring, training, and assigning work to over 80 patent paralegals across the firm's 11 U.S. offices and one office in Germany, Korte keeps many of the wheels running smoothly at Fish.

That's what Patrick Finn, managing principal, says about Korte, adding that she is an invaluable resource and leader that everyone — attorneys, paralegals and administrative staff — trusts, respects and looks up to.

Korte manages hiring, training, hours, work distri-

bution and the like. She does not handle cases anymore but works with other paralegals on hard questions — meaning she has the best of both worlds, Korte says. And earning trust with paralegals and the legal staff is very rewarding, she adds.

Finn says, "She always brings her 'A' game to everything she does. In what is often a thankless job, we are thankful every day for the work she does to keep us all on track and successful."

And we know that Fish is nothing if not on track and successful.

—Barbara L. Jones



David Oxley



You may have read a thing or two about the importance of information security and of the horrific consequences of a breach. That's why a director of information technology is critical to an office, as shown by unsung hero David Oxley.

A certified legal manager through the Association of Legal Administrators and a certified information security manager, Oxley is always motivated to bring the highest quality standards to Messerli & Kramer with respect to audit, control and security of information systems, say John Lang, the firm's president; Joshua Hasko, board of directors chair; and Mark Dixon, CFO.

Oxley says the key is to determine the best technology for the diverse practices in the firm. It is also important for the system to provide excellent remote access for attorneys. Right now, he's working on a new security initiative with tighter policies.

"He understands the legal industry and knows how to manage and adapt technology to our firm's needs and requirements," the trio said in nominating Oxley as an unsung hero.

And perhaps even more importantly, at least when it comes to technology, "He communicates with us mere mortals in a way we can actually understand," says Lang.

—Barbara L. Jones

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Maria Patino



The population of Willmar is about 20,000, and about 21 percent of its population is of Hispanic or Latino origin, according to the 2010 census. A large portion of the clientele at Mid Minnesota Legal Services in Willmar speaks only Spanish. For 20 years, clients, whether English-speaking or not, have had an ally in Maria Patino. So has the rest of the office.

The bilingual Patino manages the office from top to bottom, said supervising attorney Daniel Morris in nominating her. She also helps interpret and translate for clients, completes intakes in Spanish and assists in

case management with clients. She also handles immigration files under the supervision of an immigration attorney, and her work is of the “utmost quality,” Morris says.

Like at any law firm, some non-legal issues find their ways into the office and Patino is always ready to help. She knows her community and can provide advice and referrals on a wide spectrum, Morris says. The clientele is young, and many are scared of immigration obstacles, Patino said, and count on her to keep them informed.

“Clients trust Maria, and her hard work enables us to serve more clients in the community,” Morris adds.

—Barbara L. Jones



Sheri Peterson



In 2007, SiebenCarey was handling a large toxic tort case and Sheri Peterson came on board as a paralegal. For most of that case, she was the only support professional and she interviewed over 200 potential claimants, ultimately pursuing 45 claims.

“Sheri’s ability to analyze tens of thousands of pages of Minnesota Department of Health and EPA documents enabled us to focus on what was important for our litigation,” said Shannon Carey in nominating her as an unsung hero.

Peterson says she has a nearly photographic memory so she scans everything with her eyes.

She is now working on medical malpractice and personal injury files. Having experienced a life-changing accident herself, she knows how scared the clients are. “It’s a real joy to hold their hand and reassure them to concentrate on their health,” Peterson says.

“Sheri’s patience and determination to ensure our clients were getting the benefits they were entitled to along with the services they needed makes her a great asset to SiebenCarey. Our clients trust Sheri and rely on her to walk them through confusing insurance-related benefits and to help them get through difficult moments of their injuries,” Carey says.

—Barbara L. Jones



Sandi Poppen



Last year, while attending the Minnesota Lawyer Unsung Legal Heroes awards ceremony, Robins Kaplan associate Elizabeth Burnett turned to her seatmate and they agreed, “Sandi should be up there.”

The reason legal administrative assistant Sandi Poppen came immediately to mind was that for many she epitomizes what it means to be an unsung hero. She brings polished work skills, an inquiring mind and a positive attitude to the job.

She works in products liability complex litigation cases and Poppen’s innate curiosity is one reason she is so valuable, says Jason Pfeiffer, chair of the business litigation group. “She’ll want to understand the prod-

ucts and technology at issue, for example, so that she can have context and better understand our cases,” he said.

“We don’t have a paralegal, so I am reviewing documents and deposition kits. I want to know what didn’t work in the switch [for example], what are the parts of the switch. I’m in the emails, I’m in the documents, I’m preparing the PowerPoints. When I started with Jason, I wanted to understand what he does,” Poppen says.

“Sandi is a really exceptional woman,” says Burnett. “In my mind there’s everyone else, and Sandi is just a cut above.”

—Barbara L. Jones



Kia Schmeckpeper



When litigators in Robins Kaplan's Intellectual Property & Technology Litigation Group take on a new case, the paralegal that the attorneys ask for is Kia Schmeckpeper.

"If the matter is going to be in any way challenging or complex, I want Kia on my trial team," says partner Bill Manning.

Two cases from earlier this year are probably the best illustrations of why every Robins Kaplan IP lawyer wants her assisting on their matters.

Schmeckpeper's 2017 began with preparations for a Markman technology tutorial and hearing in a complex multi-patent-infringement case in March, for

which she supported a team of 11. Kia coordinated and assisted in a weeklong mock hearing out of the firm's Silicon Valley, California, office and attended the hearing, which was really a compact, intense "minitrial."

At the same time, Kia was preparing for an equally challenging breach-of-contract case set to go to trial in April.

"She didn't drop a thing. Nothing. It was amazing," says Manning. "I really don't know how she did it. It's a testament to her talent, tenacity and work ethic that Kia was able to pull that off so seamlessly."

—Barbara L. Jones



Kelly Thaemert



Kelly Thaemert has paint, spackle and a tool box in her office at Hellmuth & Johnson, along with vaults of payroll and personnel files. “I wear many hats,” says Thaemert. “You will find me painting and patching walls.”

One recent example of Thaemert’s ability to deliver is the pivotal role she played on the team that helped a brand new senior partner of the firm go to trial on a very large case in South Dakota. The lawyer didn’t trust electronic files, so she rented a UHaul and drove 50 boxes of evidence and documents to South Dakota herself — then picked up the boxes three weeks later.

“We were running out of time so I just did it,” she said. The trial was the firm’s first out-of-state trial, achieved a favorable result and was a great rallying point of what it could all accomplish when everyone works together, said Marketing Director Antoine LaFromboise in nominating her.

Thaemert was recently elected to be on the Board of Directors of the Minnesota chapter of the Association of Legal Administrators. Additionally, last year Thaemert earned her certified legal manager designation from ALA.

—Barbara L. Jones

Who is your Attorney of the Year?

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