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Rainmakers Share How They Shine

BY PATRICK FOLLIARD

PAMELA L. COX

Partner

Marshall, Gerstein & Borun
LLP

Intellectual Property
Chicago, Ill.

Years Practicing: **14**

Pamela Cox never assumed she was a rainmaker.

“I’m focused more on the joys of having a thriving practice than the dollars,” she says.

“The remuneration that comes with that is great, but it’s not why I get up on a Saturday morning to work on a deal. I can’t stop myself. For me, it’s a pleasure.”

As chair of Intellectual Property Transactions and a partner at Marshall, Gerstein & Borun, located in Chicago, Cox primarily concentrates on intellectual property transactions, protection and transfer for clients ranging from multinational corporations to nonprofit institutions. Like many patent lawyers, Cox has a background in science. And while she says her BS in biology only lays a foundation, it still affords her a level of comfort.

Cox speaks frequently. Topics include closing the gulf between the business and the legal side of licensing. As life science chair for the Licensing Executive Society International, she talks about demystifying license agreements for nonlegal professionals. “It shouldn’t be so daunting. Getting through a 400-page agreement can actually be fun. It’s all how you approach it,” she says with infectious enthusiasm.

Whatever the matter, says Cox, she takes her clients’ urgencies as her own. “I try to keep up with my inbox. You never know when something big might come up.”

Looking ahead, Cox concedes five-year plans are admirable; in fact, she recommends them. But nothing is more valuable than the unexpected referral. “Everything comes down to chemistry and timing,” she says. “You can’t predict new work. But you need to be ready for it.”



VIVIAN C. DE LAS CUEVAS-DIAZ

Partner

Holland & Knight LLP

Real Estate
Miami, Fla.

Years Practicing: **15**

Early in her legal career, Vivian C. de las Cuevas-Diaz was asked to devote herself exclusively to business

development. Partners wanted her to bring in new clients and let other attorneys do the substantive work. She refused. “I can sell my colleagues and let clients know we have a good product. But I can sell better when I’m doing the work. Sure, rainmaking would be a great life. But I don’t think it would work out in the long run

for me. If my team is here on a Saturday, I’m here in the office working with them.”

A real estate partner in Holland & Knight’s Miami office, de las Cuevas-Diaz deals with complex real estate transactions for both private and public clients. She also represents developers in a range of projects, including land development, condominium, office and single-family development and hotels.

“I grew up watching my Cuban immigrant parents working incredibly hard to make a life for us in Miami and give us good opportunities. It’s from them that I took a strong work ethic. Whether it’s ballet or school or whatever, I worked hard. It’s no different with my career.”

With her clients, de las Cuevas-Diaz describes herself as a hand holder and a therapist. “I am there for them always. It’s a big part of what I like about the job,” she says. “But I’m also there working very hard to make sure my clients’ best interests are protected.”

PABLO C. FERRANTE

Partner

Mayer Brown LLP

Energy

Houston, Texas

Years Practicing: **15**

Early on his journey to becoming a rainmaker, Pablo Ferrante turned a potential drawback into a definite asset.

“Being from a foreign country could be a disadvantage when trying to grow a practice doing domestic work in the U.S. Instead, I’ve used my cultural diversity, dual civil law and common law education and language skills to develop a niche practice,” explains the native Argentinian. “I focus on cross-border oil and gas project development and transactional work for companies doing business in Latin America, particularly in the Spanish-speaking countries of Latin America, such as Mexico, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru and Argentina.”

Energy and Latin America are strategic and important practice areas for the global firm Mayer Brown. As a partner focusing on the energy industry in Latin America, Ferrante plays a major role in developing and sustaining business and high-profile engagements for the firm.

Ferrante began his career as a lawyer in Buenos Aires. He came to the U.S. to earn an LL.M at Northwestern University School of Law, thinking he would return to Argentina to continue his practice there. Instead, he accepted an internship at a firm in Houston and decided to stay on. Further encouraged, he successfully sat for the bar and remained in the United States. After working for a smaller regional firm in Houston, he moved to Mayer Brown five years ago.

“To be really successful, you have to make sure your clients’ goals are your top priority. My main driver is for my clients to achieve their goals and be successful. If they succeed, so do I.”



JERRY D. HAMILTON

Managing Shareholder
Hamilton, Miller & Birthisel,
LLP

Civil Trial Litigation
Miami, Fla.

Years Practicing: **22**



Third generation lawyer Jerry

Hamilton founded Hamilton, Miller & Birthisel in 2006. He opened the original Miami office with three attorneys. Today, there are 40. Half of the firm's partners are minorities, and a third are women.

"There's dynamism to our diversity," says Hamilton, whose civil litigation practice focuses on defending major insurers and corporations. "Everyone brings a different and valuable perspective to the firm."

Hamilton came to Florida from Jamaica as a teenager. He earned his JD at the University of Florida. Rainmaking started to happen early—sometime between his fifth and seventh year. "When I started trying cases, it turned for me," he remembers. "I became the decision-maker and the problem-solver for my clients, and I loved that role. And then clients started coming to me directly. A light went off. I had built solid relationships and could now go out and develop more business."

The firm has offices throughout Florida, New York, Virginia, the U.S. Virgin Islands, the Bahamas and Jamaica. "Our Caribbean presence differentiates us from the competition. When corporations have a matter in the islands, we are the go-to law firm. This has contributed a lot to our growth."

Hamilton's philosophy is to make business development a routine part of his life. For him, that means working on relationships with his present clients, whom he considers friends, and building new relationships with potential clients. "We're dealing with real people who stay awake at night worrying about their businesses. I want to give them peace of mind. I want them to think of me as the insurance they can always rely on."



JOSEPH M. HANNA

Partner
Goldberg Segalla
Sports and Entertainment
Buffalo, N.Y.

Years Practicing: **9**

At age six, Joseph Hanna set his sights on becoming president of the United States, and he believed the only way to get there was to become

a lawyer. "I wanted to be the president, and I thought becoming a lawyer would help. I come from a blue collar family in Buffalo, N.Y. There were no lawyers in my family, but I was determined."

Hanna met his goal of becoming an attorney and seems to be well on his way to becoming president. After graduating from the SUNY Buffalo Law School in 2005, he was hired by Goldberg Segalla, the firm's first associate hired directly from law school.

Within two-and-a-half years he made partner, focusing on sports and entertainment law. "I'm not about the hard sell," says Hanna. "If a client wants to work with us, we will do the best job at the best rate, and we will grow together."

An avid golfer, he combines his love for the game with business development and philanthropy. In 2008, Hanna founded Bunkers in Baghdad Inc., a nonprofit that collects and ships golf equipment for rehabilitative and recreational purposes to U.S. troops throughout the world. Bunkers has collected more than 5.2 million golf balls and 250,000 golf clubs for wounded warriors, veterans and active duty military members.

But Hanna doesn't spend all of his time on the links. "I'm involved with both business development and the substantive work. I'm always around for my clients and here to help whenever they call upon me. It is all about relationship building and being comfortable with one another. At the end of the day, if there is a problem, my clients call me first because they know that I will be there for them and will not stop until they are happy."

S. MANOJ JEGASOTHY

Managing Partner—Pittsburgh
Office

Gordon Rees Scully
Mansukhani, LLP
Commercial Litigation
Pittsburgh, Penn.

Years Practicing: **17**



When asked by associates how

best to make partner, rainmaking attorney Manoj Jegasothy tells them, "Make it so the firm has to make you partner. Usually that's the result when you have unique legal skills or you've developed enough business that the firm has to recognize it. Once you're in that place, you control your own fate. You have your own clients and your own work. That's real autonomy."

"At firms, successful business development means a greater degree of contribution, which leads to a greater degree of respect and compensation. But the biggest thing it means is autonomy."

A commercial litigator with a specialty in breach-of-contract disputes, class-action matters and antitrust, Jegasothy is managing partner of Gordon Rees's Pittsburgh office.

He says responsiveness and quality legal work are vital to sustaining existing clients—an essential part of rainmaking. In addition to keeping clients happy, he seeks out potential business on a regular basis, so there are always balls in the air. When meeting potential clients, he says, "I like to sit with them and hear their problems and come up with potential solutions, rather than recite my own résumé."

The son of Sri Lankan immigrants (both doctors), Jegasothy says most of his clients have become his friends over time. "It's more than the client-attorney relationship," he adds. "And—knock on wood—mixing friendship with business has never been problematic for me. They always rely on me for advice, whether it's what they want to hear or not."



ALLEGRA J. LAWRENCE-HARDY

Partner
Sutherland Asbill & Brennan LLP
Business and Commercial Litigation
Atlanta, Ga.
Years Practicing: **18**

Allegra Lawrence-Hardy has had the same business phone number her entire career. “I joined Sutherland when I finished my judicial clerkship for Judge Black on the Eleventh Circuit. As a young lawyer, I had wonderful mentors who encouraged me to spend as much time as I could with my clients to understand their business concerns. I still represent some of those same clients today.”

She also lives in the same neighborhood as the house where she grew up in Atlanta. The daughter of successful professionals, she was encouraged to achieve academically and professionally. “All of the women in my family attended Spelman College, so that was an easy choice for me. When I entered Yale Law School, my sister was already attending graduate school at MIT and was headed to Harvard as a post-doc. My parents set the bar very high.”

As a partner at Sutherland, Lawrence-Hardy co-heads both the business litigation team and the labor and employment team. She also is a member of the firm’s management committee. She credits her rainmaking success to her focus on understanding her clients’ businesses. “Really knowing the business is the best way I can give comprehensive advice. And I’m more interested in serving as a trusted, continuing advisor than giving an ivory tower answer to a particular question. Knowing their business allows me to understand my clients’ needs and take them into consideration when developing an ongoing legal strategy.

“I like to get on a plane and go to clients, to get out and walk the manufacturing floor, to really understand the technology,” she adds. “The business piece impacts a great deal of the legal strategy. Every good relationship requires an investment.”



SALIMA A. MERANI, PhD

Partner
Knobbe, Martens, Olson & Bear LLP
Intellectual Property
Orange County, Calif.
Years Practicing: **14**

An IP partner in Knobbe Marten’s Orange County office, Salima Merani divides her time representing startup companies and venture capital firms. Because her clients are primarily in the health care and wellness field, Salima leverages her technical background daily. “It is a thrill to be able to speak an inventor’s language when developing patent strategy; it is incredibly rewarding.”

Merani believes that excellent work, high-level strategy, responsive-

ness and commitment will sell itself. “Although I am an intellectual property lawyer,” she says, “I also focus on understanding the client’s overall business and what our firm can do to add value. As a result, most of my new clients come from referrals from former or existing clients. I sometimes get referrals from lawyers and CEOs to whom I have been adverse in the past. I take that as a great compliment.”

Passion, hard work and a great team make rainmaking possible. The elements combined, she says, are the key to her career. Merani also credits the meritocratic environment of her firm as an essential foundation for rainmaking.

“We were immigrants, and like many immigrants, education was of paramount importance,” says Merani, who duly obliged her Indian born parents’ expectations. She was awarded a doctorate in neuroscience after completing her undergraduate degree in genetics at McGill University in Montreal and subsequently earned her law degree at Berkeley. Merani’s first legal job was as a summer intern at Knobbe Martens—the same firm she is with today. “As a summer intern,” says Merani, “I realized I had found a firm with an uncompromising dedication to entrepreneurship, excellence and encouragement, so I had no reason to look elsewhere.”

FUSAE NARA

Partner
Pillsbury Winthrop Shaw Pittman LLP
Litigation
New York, N.Y.
Years Practicing: **21**



Before coming to the U.S., Fusae Nara, a rainmaking partner in Pillsbury’s Manhattan office, worked as an unlicensed lawyer for a corporation in her native Japan. Nara explains that the number of licensed lawyers in Japan is small compared to the U.S. Her situation was good, but Nara wanted to take her knowledge of Japan’s legal culture and go to work for an American firm representing Japanese companies.

So Nara packed up and moved to the U.S., earned a JD at Hofstra University and subsequently joined a firm where she inherited a book of business from her mentor. For seven years, Nara worked with him representing Japanese companies. When he unexpectedly died from a massive heart attack, his business went directly to Nara with the firm’s full support. Consequently, she had some business before she ever made partner.

“However the work comes to you, you still must prove your skillset and commitment. I had to show colleagues that I was for real, willing to work as hard as it takes to get things done.”

Today, Nara represents Japanese companies in complex litigation and multiplied the business over the past decade. “When I first started, my clients liked that I was Japanese but not that I was young and female. Initially, it was difficult for me to be taken seriously by the Japanese businessmen I encountered. But after I proved myself and they overcame their initial resistance, they remained loyal. I’ve had many of the same clients my entire career.”