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Mindy Sooter

Wilmer Hale's new partner-in-charge of Denver office earns praise for high-stakes IP litigation and firm leadership

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Mindy Sooter says her first big challenge as the new partner-in-charge of Wilmer Hale's Denver office will be helping attorneys and staff return to the office once the risk of coronavirus has cleared.

"I think our first order of business will be working on a seamless re-entry to working in the office and what the new post-coronavirus workplace looks like," Sooter said.

"I've had a leadership role for the past three months or so while we've been in this situation working from home," she added, "and it's been an interesting challenge — keeping people engaged, communicating with the office, checking in on people and just kind of making sure that folks are taken care of during this challenging time."

Despite the pandemic, Sooter said, the firm is "continuing to hire and grow and thrive," and the return to the workplace will involve onboarding new hires as well as implementing health and safety precautions. "I really want to make sure that we can all get back into the office soon safely so that we can start meeting those [new] people and feeling like we're a

community again," she said.

In addition to being named partner-in-charge of the Denver office, Sooter counts a number of notable client wins among her accomplishments in the past year. The intellectual property litigator was part of a team that won full dismissal of trademark claims against Bank of America. And while she represents household names like Comcast, Intel and Apple, her clients also include local early-stage companies like Live Power and Yes Energy. She recently settled a trade secrets case against the Boulder-based companies "on very favorable terms," she said. "The case was very important and mission-critical to them, so that was a really good achievement."

"I like to think of myself as a trial lawyer," Sooter said. "And I'm lucky enough to work at a firm that does a lot of trials in high-stakes litigation."

But she didn't always picture herself becoming a lawyer, having taken "a little bit of a convoluted path" to the legal profession. After earning an engineering degree from Texas A&M University, she worked in computer systems consulting for several years. Around the time she had her first child, she decided she was ready for a change, and she went back to school for a

Master of Engineering degree at CU Boulder.

"It was an interdisciplinary degree, so I was really excited about the technical classes and really dreading the policy and the law classes," Sooter said. "But once I actually took the policy and the law classes, I really fell in love with them."

She credits Colorado Attorney General Phil Weiser, who was one of her professors in those dreaded policy classes, with encouraging her interest in the legal side of technology. "Through talking to him and others, I decided that maybe law school would be a good path for me," she said. She attended the University of Colorado Law School and started practicing law in 2003.

Her engineering and technical background made high-tech and intellectual property law a "natural fit" for her second career. Sooter specializes in high-stakes litigation involving patents and trade secrets, an area she says has been growing in recent years.

Her cases for big company clients frequently have high dollar amounts attached, while her smaller clients are often involved in bet-the-company litigation. "One of the benefits of that is I get to work with teams of people and help lead those all the way from the beginning of the case through trial," Sooter said.

"I love the diversity of my job. I get to work with experts and professors and technology. I get to go to trial, go to court, argue hearings, write briefs, do research and work with large teams, so it really brings a full spectrum," she said.

In addition to serving as official office mentor for Wilmer Hale associates in Denver, Sooter mentors about a half dozen junior attorneys informally, many of them women with families who are trying to navigate the work-life balance and other challenges of the profession.

She has also mentored through the Colorado IP Inn of Court, served as chair of the Colorado Bar Association's IP section and on the board of the Colorado Lawyers Committee. Sooter is involved in Wilmer Hale's pro bono work with immigration and asylum case clients, many of them minors who have made it to the U.S. and need help with guardianship applications and other paperwork to stay in the country.

Adding to her long list of accolades, Sooter was recognized this year by CU Law for distinguished achievement in private practice, and she's one of six people who will be honored at the law school's annual awards banquet to be held in the fall. •

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