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Amicus Curious

Lawyer finds niche, balance in work

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Nerissa Coyle McGinn carries a client list that would make some men green with envy.

With an intellectual property law practice that focuses on trademark clearance, advertising and promotions, McGinn represents clients in the television, sports and video game industries as senior counsel at Loeb & Loeb LLP.

"I think people, guys especially, are interested when they read my bio and see some of my clients," she said. "It is a ton of fun."

McGinn handles trademark clearance and counseling for Turner Broadcasting System Inc., which includes Cartoon Network, CNN, truTV and Turner Sports.

She also takes care of the advertising and promotions work for the New York Giants and Washington Redskins as well as some trademark matters for Chicago-based William Wrigley Jr. Co. and its confection brands.

On top of having her hands in a variety of projects dealing with sports, candy and cartoons, McGinn represents an advertising company that does work for Burger King and provides legal services for clients who produce content for mobile devices and video games.

McGinn said she enjoys the excitement and challenges that come along with representing well-known clients and practicing in a field that technology is constantly changing.

What makes her practice even better, McGinn said, is that Loeb & Loeb lets her do it on a flexible schedule.

The 39-year-old mother of two works three days a week, a schedule that McGinn said allows her to strike the perfect balance between work and family.

"It's a great schedule and lets me spend time with my kids," said McGinn, who serves as the leader of her 7-year-old daughter's Girl Scout troop and as the "room mom" at her 4-year-old son's school.

Occasionally, however, McGinn's law practice and family life intersect, like when she recently worked from home on a trademark matter for Burger King's new kids' meal.

The packaging includes a wearable cardboard crown, interactive games and a website that will let kids choose a charity that Burger King will donate a penny of the meal's proceeds to.



Nerissa Coyle McGinn

"When I printed the packaging out, my then-6-year-old daughter saw it and said, 'Mommy, what is this?'" McGinn said. "She was so excited about it that I had to tell my client that my daughter loved it. It just made my day."

Her recent trademark work for Burger King came through her client Pitch, a Los Angeles-based advertising agency that represents Burger King, Nickelodeon and shoe manufacturer ASICS America Corp. She handles IP and advertising matters in relation to Pitch's representation of these three clients.

Another crossover between her professional career and family life is that she serves as legal counsel to Silver Chalice Ventures, a digital marketing company that she said her husband, Jason Coyle, run.

While McGinn said she can't imagine having any other type of law practice, it did take her a few years to find her niche.

The New Jersey native said she knew she wanted to be a lawyer from a young age. She participated in mock trials for her high school and

at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, where she earned her undergraduate degree in 1994.

During her time at Harvard Law School, McGinn interned at the school's legal aid bureau, a prosecutor's office in Boston and with the U.S. attorney's office.

She originally wanted to be a prosecutor, but McGinn said she realized it wasn't for her after her first federal trial. Even at that time, McGinn said she could tell it would be tough to balance a heavy litigation practice with a family.

McGinn's first job out of law school was at Mayer, Brown LLP, where she focused her practice on general litigation.

After about three years and some recruiting efforts, McGinn left Mayer, Brown to get into the world of IP law at Pattishall, McAuliffe, Newbury, Hilliard & Geraldson LLP.

"It was so exciting. I switched in 2000, which was right around the time of the Internet boom," she said. "Trademark and e-commerce and domain name issues were huge at that point."

Douglas N. Masters was the one who recruited McGinn to Pattishall, McAuliffe.

He was the firm's hiring partner until about 2003, when a few partners, as well as McGinn, left to open the Chicago office of Loeb & Loeb.

Masters, who now works with McGinn as the chairman of Loeb & Loeb's IP practice group, said IP law wasn't as popular of a practice area a decade ago so he frequently recruited litigation attorneys to join the IP field.

"She had a great pedigree, good training and seemed very motivated," Masters said of why he recruited McGinn to Pattishall, McAuliffe in 2000.

Masters said he couldn't be happier with his decision to recruit McGinn and her choice to join Loeb & Loeb, where he said she has done a great job developing her practice.

"She's really come into her own," he said, stressing her expertise and ability to earn trust from clients in the trademark, sports, online marketing and video game industries.

Masters said McGinn has a knack for working with clients, communicating clearly and in easily understandable terms. This, he said, is the result of McGinn always

being on top of the rapidly changing laws and regulations affecting her practice areas.

Not only does she have to stay afloat of changes in Illinois, but McGinn said she has to keep up with the laws of all 50 states since many of her clients' advertising, promotions and sweepstakes span the nation.

She said one of the biggest challenges she faces in her practice right now stems from the creation of mobile applications for smartphones. McGinn said the law hasn't caught up with technology yet, leaving some gaps in the law when it comes to mobile phones and federal bans against unsolicited communications.

William J. Heller, senior vice president and general counsel for the New York Giants, said he has been more than pleased with McGinn's promotions work for his company.

Heller said McGinn is responsive, knowledgeable and effective. And while he frequently questions the invoices of some of his other outside counsel, Heller said he has never questioned McGinn's bills.

"I have never and would never go to anyone else in this area besides Nerissa," he said.