

Shook Hires Product Liability Partner From Walmart

By James Mills

Law360 (March 9, 2022, 4:48 PM EST) -- Shook Hardy & Bacon LLP has snatched a Walmart in-house counsel and product liability expert as a partner in its Washington office.

Veronica Hayes Gromada, who spent 17 years at Walmart, has joined the Shook product liability litigation practice, the firm announced Tuesday, noting that she's experienced as a litigator handling product liability cases as well as tort litigation. At Shook, she will counsel clients on business operations, employment, insurance, logistics and supply chain issues, the firm said. The team she joins works in consumer goods, food and beverage, and pharmaceutical industries, as well as software, science and technology.



Veronica Hayes
Gromada

Shook told Law360 Pulse the pandemic was a period of reflection for her.

"I realized I was limiting myself to corporate opportunities [by staying at Walmart] when I could create my own path forward at a law firm by creating my own practice within a practice that had ... all of the resources, the law firm culture and existing book of clients and the ability to support new clients that were of interest to me," Gromada told Law360 on Wednesday morning.

"After doing a lot of reflection on the work I want to do, the skills and abilities that I have, the experience under my belt from being at Walmart for 17 years, the stars aligned and there was an opportunity for me to go to Shook."

Shook chair Madeleine McDonough said she is delighted Gromada made the move.

"Veronica is an excellent strategist who enhances our litigation team for clients. She understands the in-house needs of large corporations and brings tremendous experience in complex litigation," McDonough said in a statement. "Social governance, crisis management, threat analysis and highly effective litigation management — Veronica hits the mark."

Shook partner Patrick Oot, who is based in the D.C. office and has collaborated with Gromada for many years on mass tort strategy and pretrial litigation matters, is equally excited to welcome her aboard.

"Veronica is a great fit for our firm," Oot said in a statement. "She brings a global in-house view that few have, with a laser focus on litigation. She'll be able to offer our clients insight and strategy that takes

into account their views through the lens of a premier trial firm. It's a win-win for our clients."

Gromada has been living in Bentonville, Arkansas, where Walmart is headquartered, but now plans to divide her time between D.C. and Houston.

"I definitely will be heavily D.C.-focused because I want a truly national practice. And being in the northeastern part of the country is where there is a lot of growth opportunity for the firm," she said.

She also wants to get an apartment in Houston because that's where her roots are. She grew up in southeastern Texas and earned her law degree from Texas Southern University's Thurgood Marshall School of Law in Houston in 2000.

She has spent much of her career dealing with products and product liability, and said she enjoys the area.

"That has been one constant throughout my career: product liability," she said. "Shook is very well known as the preeminent trial firm specifically within the area of product liability. ... So it dovetailed nicely with my experience."

When she started at Walmart, she expected to be there five or 10 years, not 17. She said the company kept innovating and offering her new challenges.

"Because [Walmart] continued to innovate and implement new business operations, new product lines, new services for its customers, that created new legal challenges, new problems to solve. It kept being fresh and interesting over the years," she said.

"I've had the benefit of working on everything from class action litigation involving labor and employment issues to working on discovery for global investigations. ... Now I've decided I can do this, but I can do this on a somewhat grander stage by working with an array of corporate clients across the country" with Shook, she said.

--Editing by Rich Mills.