

## Shook Hardy's Chair On Steering Growth, Fostering Diversity

By **Adrian Cruz**

*Law360 (June 9, 2021, 4:44 PM EDT)* -- Shook Hardy & Bacon LLP has embarked on a major expansion over the last couple of years, bringing its presence to major cities such as Los Angeles, Boston and Atlanta. Since January, the Kansas City, Missouri-based firm has also added offices in St. Louis and New York, and it brought on board a six-person team of technology attorneys in Seattle to help supplement its growing intellectual property practice.

With over 500 attorneys in 17 offices across the U.S. and London, Shook Hardy has represented a number of major companies over the years in a variety of class actions and other large forms of litigation, including pharmaceutical giants GlaxoSmithKline and Johnson & Johnson, automotive companies such as Ford and Toyota and most of the largest tobacco companies, including Altria.



Madeleine McDonough

Along with its work in the courthouse, Shook Hardy has been proactive about diversity and inclusion, with the firm highlighting a leadership contingent that's 50% made up of women and people from other underrepresented groups and an action plan for 2021 that includes a more focused approach on recruiting and retaining minority and LGBTQ attorneys.

Shook Hardy chair Madeleine McDonough talked with Law360 Pulse on Wednesday about the firm's growth, its commitment to diversity and inclusion, and its response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

This interview has been edited for length and clarity.

**Shook Hardy recently opened a St. Louis office in the firm's third major expansion of 2021. What's fueled this recent expansion wave? Are there plans for more expansion during the second half of the year?**

A lot of our expansion has been a direct result of clients. We have various clients who, frankly, have asked us to hire some lateral counsel that they really like but who they think might do better for them on our platform. We have 17 offices now, and a lot of clients think that if we can hire some lawyers they know and like, who may not have the best or most optimal platform for what they need, it would be helpful if they joined Shook. As a result, much of our growth comes from client requests and

conversations with them about what they need and who might be best suited to provide those services.

I don't think we're very likely to open another new office location, and there's no current plans to do that this year. But we have actually received lots of inquiries from lawyers who practice in the cities we currently have offices, including St. Louis, who have asked us to take a look at them to potentially join these existing locations. As a result, I think the growth will come in cities where we already have offices, and they will simply grow there, but I don't think there's a new location on the immediate horizon.

### **What criteria goes into deciding which people Shook Hardy adds to its team?**

Strategically, we're primarily looking for people with excellent reputations in complex commercial litigation, IP litigation, environmental litigation and other key areas that we're growing and that our primary clients need excellent services in.

We're also looking for people who may be able to fit those needs and are a good match for the culture of the firm. We're always interested in looking, but it always has to be a very careful fit, and we take our time to make sure they'd be a good match with the firm.

### **Having been at Shook Hardy for over 30 years, how has the firm grown and developed since you first joined?**

I summer clerked here in 1989, and since then, I've stayed at Shook for the long term. I've held many different positions in the firm, and I've been on most of its internal committees, serving on the executive committee for 15 years or so before becoming chair of the firm.

Working in other committees such as pro bono, diversity, professional development and hiring, all of these different areas helped me learn internally and externally, and it prepared me well to be chair. I also feel fortunate because I know so many people at the firm, just about everybody, because I've grown up with it.

The firm has grown significantly, and I think we really are viewed as the go-to trial firm especially in areas such as science, health, information and technology. I think we try more cases than any large defense firm that I know. We're very heavily involved in mass torts, MDLs, class actions, and we've just tried growing the areas that make the most sense for our clients.

IP has grown significantly, both in prosecution and in litigation, and now, technology transaction work has also become a much larger part of what we do. Just this year, our Seattle office was expanded to incorporate a group of truly A+ lawyers who focused on tech transactions.

That's really the story of our firm: We have deep expertise in certain industries, and we learn what clients most need in those industries, and we expand to adjacent areas to help them meet those needs as well with deep expertise throughout.

### **What was Shook Hardy's initial response to the COVID-19 pandemic? And now that things look to be settling down, what's the plan for the future?**

I think we really pivoted well during the pandemic. We were fortunate that we were able to go remote on day one and every lawyer was able to work from home. We were also lucky that we had invested in our infrastructure long before the pandemic, having a robust IT system that allowed us to not miss a

beat and other support services available to us.

The thing we did really well was listen to our clients. We were in regular consistent communication with clients, finding out what they really needed and what they didn't need. We beefed up the areas that our clients needed immediate help in during COVID, things like force majeure contract issues and lots of thorny employment issues.

Arbitrations became a key for us as well. While we're known as a trial firm with dozens of major trials each year, when courthouses closed, a lot of our clients moved to alternative forms of dispute resolution like mediations and arbitration. We literally did hundreds of arbitrations last year and this year, and now it's a growing area for us. We worked in many different ways to address the concerns of COVID and ended up doing very well.

Now, we're simply trying to take the lessons we learned from clients on how to best service them and incorporate them going forward. We're always monitoring the situation from a health and safety perspective, and we're tentatively thinking of returning to most locations by July 6. We'll always have to follow the local safety and health guidelines, so there might be some locations that can't reopen in July, but most of our locations are shooting for that date.

**Shook Hardy has expressed a dedication to diversity and inclusion, including the large numbers of women and minorities in positions of leadership. What are some initiatives the firm has done over the years to help promote diversity and inclusion?**

We are known for having a wide array of initiatives, and I'm really proud of them, done through the great work of so many people across the firm. One is called our Shook Scholars Institute, a nationwide pipeline initiative focused on 1L law students where they spend a period of time at the firm to learn directly from judges, attorneys and clients, doing things like negotiation practice and trial practice. They learn all kinds of methods to succeed in law school while being introduced to the law firm environment. It's been a really successful and robust program, and we meet lots of first-year law students through that.

On the other end of the spectrum, we have what we call our Judge Jon Gray leadership academy, named after a retired judge who's a very active leader of our professional development group by helping people become first-tier trial lawyers and relationship partners for clients. In that initiative, we have very senior associates on the verge of becoming partners, and we immerse them in some very comprehensive activities to help them transition into the next phase of their careers.

We also have a client diversity advisory panel that helps us with these initiatives, where we can vulnerably talk with them about what we might be doing well, areas we need to improve on and making sure that we're partnering with them. Many of our clients have diversity programs of their own, and we try to support those and vice versa.

We pride ourselves on the fact that we almost never say no to any idea related to diversity. We really focus on it, and it's an all-in mission and value of the firm. There's so many aspects of our multi-tentacled diversity program trying to address all the different areas, ranging from recruitment, hiring, development, promotion, essentially the entire timeline of a lawyer's career.

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