

## Shook Lures Merchant & Gould's Leader to Strengthen IP Group

By Everett Catts

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**S**hook, Hardy & Bacon has lured away a midsize law firm's top attorney to join its intellectual property practice group at its Atlanta office.

Kansas City-based Shook, an Am Law 200 firm, hired Chris Leonard, who'd spent the past five years as Minneapolis-based Merchant & Gould's CEO and managing director. He started at Shook Feb. 27 under the role of senior counsel. Leonard, who's been a licensed attorney since 1994 and a patent lawyer since 1997, spent 22½ years of his career at Merchant & Gould. For six years, beginning in 2000, he worked at the firm's Atlanta office, and, prior to becoming CEO, spent seven years on its executive committee.

"I managed the firm throughout the COVID years, and as that drew to a close, I made the decision to step down from management because I wanted to go back to what I had always done as a practicing attorney, which is U.S. and international patent procurement for companies of all sizes and for individual inventors," he said in an interview. "I made the decision that I wanted to spend the rest of my career getting back to that, particularly in the technical areas of electrical software and mechanical technologies."

Leonard added one reason he joined Shook is its "deep technical and experienced bench in IP."

"But secondly, I have known a number of the Shook attorneys, particularly the very senior attorneys over 20 years because we represented clients in the same technical space but we also represented large clients where both firms represent the same clients," he said. "So I got to know a number of their people. When I made the decision to step down from Merchant & Gould, it was very easy to move to Shook because of the relationships there."

"But also Shook serves industries that are directly in my technical and legal areas. They do a lot of patent procurement and patent analysis work in the technical areas I specialize in. But ... Shook, Hardy & Bacon, in addition to their really strong IP business, they do amazing work in other areas, such as products



**Colin Kelly (left) and Chris Leonard of Shook, Hardy & Bacon.**

(Courtesy photos)

liability, in a wide range of industries including automotive, telecommunications and everything in between, mostly on the defense side."

Colin Kelly, Shook's Atlanta office managing partner, said Leonard's experience will serve the firm well.

"Chris has served in nearly every national law firm management role (including managing partner) throughout his career," he said in an emailed statement. "Having Chris join us not only expands our intellectual property services in Atlanta and nationally—it gives us a deeper bench of thoughtful leadership to support our strategic growth. We have doubled the size of the Atlanta office since we launched in June 2019."

In an emailed statement, Leonard Searcy, an IP attorney and partner with Shook's Atlanta and Kansas City offices, added, "We have known and worked with Chris for many years in the intellectual property space. He brings an impressive array of credentials, especially in IP, which will help us as we continue to expand our IP services nationally, and in particular, the South-east and Northeast regions of the country."

Email and phone messages sent to a Merchant & Gould spokeswoman seeking comment on Leonard's departure were not returned by deadline.