

Legal Limelight: **Sue Werstak, Managing Partner of Shook, Hardy & Bacon, St. Louis office**

■ Staff Report



Sue Werstak

SUE WERSTAK became the managing partner of one of Shook, Hardy & Bacon's St. Louis office on Jan. 1, joining the growing ranks of women and diverse partners in leadership roles at the firm.

Shook was founded in 1889 in Kansas City, but it didn't have a permanent presence in Missouri's other large legal market until 2021. Werstak helped found the office and inherited her current role from fellow founder Adam Miller, now co-chair of the firm's national environmental and toxic tort litigation practice.

Werstak is a seasoned litigator in high-stakes food, beverage and agribusiness cases. She's defended clients ranging from auto manufacturers to chemical companies. In 2011, Werstak, then of Thompson Coburn, was part of the successful defense team for several cigarette-makers who were sued by hospitals alleging they suffered hundreds of millions of dollars in economic losses from treating sick smokers.

Werstak earned her law degree from Villanova University's Charles Widger School of Law in 1997. She is a member of the Bar Association of Metropolitan St. Louis, the Missouri Organization of Defense Lawyers,

the American Bar Association and the National LGBT Bar Association.

How did you come to be in your particular practice?

As a very green first-year associate at large firm on the east coast, I was called into a senior partner's office, whom I never worked with before, and was asked if I wanted to go to an out of town, multi-plaintiff products liability trial and be part of a multi-firm defense team with lawyers from Shook, Hardy & Bacon. I had been hired to work in the employment practice group, but this was an opportunity that I could not pass up. The next week I headed to Birmingham to attend my very first jury research exercise and then I was off to Memphis for a multi-month trial. I was able to observe and work with some of the best lawyers in the country. Most importantly, this senior partner became my mentor and friend and helped me shape my career. I've practiced in the products liability/toxic tort field ever since.

What is the best part of your practice?

Building teams that work together, share a diversity of ideas and achieve the best results for our clients — and have fun doing it. I have been very fortunate to work on teams with incredibly talented people throughout my career. It

has not only given me opportunities and made me a better lawyer, but it has also introduced me to people who have enriched my life beyond the practice of law.

What is the best career advice you have received?

Work hard and be prepared so that you are ready to say yes to every opportunity that comes your way.

What advice do you have for young lawyers?

The same advice that I received. I would add to that a few more things I learned along the way: Have the confidence to say yes when the opportunities you've earned come your way. Gain the respect and loyalty of the more senior lawyers you work with — they will be your advocates when you are not in the room. You can accomplish greater things together than you'll accomplish on your own.

What is your favorite thing to do away from work?

I enjoy spending time with family and friends and active/adventure travel, especially visiting the national parks and other dramatic landscapes. Hiking, biking and the outdoors de-stresses me and helps me disconnect from my intense work schedule. At the end of a day of adventure, I enjoy an ice-cold IPA at a local micro-brewery.