

Shook Hardy Adds Experienced Trial Atty In Miami

By **Nathan Hale**

Law360, Miami (August 06, 2014, 5:33 PM ET) -- Shook Hardy & Bacon LLP has announced the addition of litigator Miranda Lundeen Soto as partner in its Miami office, bringing on an attorney with a strong record in her trial practice concentrating on the defense of commercial disputes, legal malpractice claims, personal injury cases, insurance and premises liability.

Soto, who joins the firm from Hamilton Miller & Birthisel LLP, will be a member of the firm's Global Product Liability Group, which handles a substantial amount of tobacco litigation for the Philip Morris wing of Altria Group Inc.

It was Altria, which was already a client of Shook Hardy, that initiated her recruitment to the firm after observing her trial work. When Shook Hardy had an opening for a trial attorney, Soto proved to be a strong fit.

"Miranda is well known to one of our major client's in-house attorneys who are delighted that she has agreed to join our team," Bill Geraghty, managing partner of Shook Hardy's Miami office, said in a statement. "We believe that her considerable courtroom skills will complement and enhance the exceptional service our industry clients have come to rely on."

In an interview Wednesday, Soto said she was also attracted to Shook Hardy because of its national platform. The firm consists of 450 attorneys in 12 offices in the United States and Europe.

"I have been doing some business development work on more of a local level and trying cases on a local level in Florida, and they have such a national presence," she said. "They are across the country, and are well respected and well known."

In addition to her work for Hamilton Miller, Soto has also previously served as lead counsel for the Miami and Fort Myers offices of Allstate Insurance Co. and as an assistant state attorney with the Miami-Dade County prosecutor's office, ultimately serving as division chief in the Juvenile Division. She has also provided legal opinions for CNN.

She has had an especially busy past several years in terms of trial work.

She was appointed as special trial counsel in a 21-plaintiff franchisee-franchisor case against Shell Oil Corp., whose Motiva Enterprises LLC subsidiary was accused by individual gas station owners of attempting to drive them out of business through acts such as below-cost pricing, unfair competition,

and violations of the Florida Motor Fuel Marketing Practices Act and the Petroleum Marketing Practices Act. The case was settled before going to trial, Soto said.

She also won a complete verdict for Allstate in a case of first impression in which the insurer claimed public policy violations of the Florida Motor Vehicle Repair Act and took a stand against body shops' practice of essentially holding accident victims' cars hostage for illegal storage fees, according to Soto.

She also has served as part of trial teams that secured complete defense victories for the law firm Shutts & Bowen in two multimillion dollar professional malpractice lawsuits involving real estate development transactions in Miami and in the Dominican Republic, with one case also involving the representation of two of the firm's partners on an individual basis as well.

It was in the first of these malpractice cases that Altria had an opportunity to observe Soto's work, leading to her new endeavor joining Shook Hardy.

Soto said she hopes to have the opportunity to do more work on legal malpractice cases, noting that these cases do not often go to trial.

"It's very rewarding work to defend lawyers, especially the lawyers and law firms I got to represent [in these recent cases]," she said. "They were such good lawyers, and they did good work. I was very passionate about those cases."

Soto is admitted to practice before the Florida state courts as well as U.S. District Courts for the Southern and Middle Districts of Florida.

She received her law degree from the Drake University School of Law after earning her undergraduate degree at the University of Alabama.

--Editing by Mark Lebetkin.