CONGRATULATIONS
LAURA GRAF

Barnes & Thornburg is delighted to congratulate Laura Graf of Ryan Companies for receiving the prestigious In-House Counsel Award. Laura’s thoughtful and collaborative leadership style helps shape her company’s culture and vision.
For more than 65 years, Presbyterian Homes & Services has been honoring God by enriching the lives and touching the hearts of older adults by providing a broad array of high quality housing choices and compassionate care services.

For the last 16 years, Janna Severance has been part of that mission. We congratulate her on her 2022 Minnesota Lawyer In-House Counsel Award.

PresHomes.org
A drive down Interstate 35W offers a good example. Ames built the new bridge over the Minnesota River in Burnsville, the Crosstown Commons, Lake Street to Interstate 94, and the Express Lanes project north of downtown.

In addition, the company has designed and constructed many airport and highway projects in Minneapolis-St. Paul, Denver, Phoenix and Salt Lake City. Goderstad also said Ames recently received a $115 million contract from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers - St. Paul District to build three control structures for the Fargo-Moorhead Red River diversions project.

Lately, Goderstad has overseen contracts for site grading and improvements for a 2,000-acre electric battery factory site for Toyota in North Carolina. Because of inflation and supply chain issues, projects have become more challenging, but “it’s still very exciting to see the projects that I work with being safely, profitably and successfully completed,” Goderstad says.

—Frank Jossi
CONGRATULATE

RENEE L. JACKSON
GENERAL COUNSEL

2022
IN-HOUSE COUNSEL HONOREE
HEALTH CARE

Janna Severance

Presbyterian Homes & Services

Even though her legal career has reached the three-decade mark, Janna Severance has no plans to retire just yet. “I’d like to work as long as I can,” Severance says. “It’s a worthwhile endeavor, and the people here are wonderful to work with.”

As in-house counsel for the nonprofit Presbyterian Homes & Services, a long-term care provider based in Roseville, Severance advises clients on business law matters, including corporate finance.

In that role, she advises on issues specific to the long-term care industry. She relies on a deep well of experience and leadership in the areas of finance, contract and regulatory law. Severance has played a key part on a leadership team that has built or bought thousands of new senior apartment homes over the years.

“We do a lot of financing through tax-exempt bonds,” she says. “We use that to build senior housing and provide other services for seniors.”

Last year was a busy one for Severance, her 16th at Presbyterian. She either led or helped on the closing of more than $330 million of new financing, creating 832 new units of senior housing across Minnesota, Iowa and Wisconsin.

A graduate of Carleton College, Severance earned a master’s degree in communication disorders, going on to work for several years in a special education facility with children and young adults with severe physical and mental deficits.

After earning a law degree, she went on to work at five Twin Cities law firms, making partner at three of them.

“I never wanted to be a litigator, and business-related courses were always my favorite in law school,” she says.

Severance had served on the Presbyterian Home & Services board, so joining the organization in 2006 wasn’t a hard decision.

“I work on general business and contract issues, and some regulatory work,” she says. “The less exciting it is, the better.”

—Dan Heilman

HEALTH CARE

Scott Lynch

Blue Cross Blue Shield of Minnesota

Aft er graduating with a degree in public relations decades ago from Mount Mercy University in Iowa, Scott Lynch found a claims job at the St. Paul Companies. While working in the firm’s Denver and Los Angeles offices, he collaborated with attorneys on malpractice claims and began to consider a legal career.

“I thought ‘I’m going to give law school a shot,’” Lynch says. “I’ve loved it ever since. I was fortunate to discover law because before that I didn’t know what I wanted to do.”

Lynch has had a long career as an attorney and general counsel, including stints at Oppenheimer, Wolff & Donnelly, Prime Therapeutics and Novartis Consumer Health before joining Blue Cross Blue Shield in 2007 as the chief legal officer and senior vice president. He manages 13 attorneys and more than 250 employees.

One of the most significant issues he dealt with in his career focused on a case against the federal government involving reimbursements for high-risk patients using the Affordable Care Act to help pay for insurance. Blue Cross Blue Shield lost more than $500 million after the federal government failed to honor its reimbursement obligations, Lynch said.

The company sued the federal government in a case that reached the U.S. Supreme Court in 2015. The court ruled in favor of Blue Cross Blue Shield, allowing it to recover $250 million. The suit and Lynch’s career at the company reflect how intertwined legal and regulatory issues are with the business side of health care, he said.

Lynch, who serves on the Academy of Holy Angels and Innovative Blood Resources boards, lost his wife and sister to cancer.

“I’ve made a sincere effort to change things for the better, and that’s been fulfilling for me,” he says.

—Frank Jossi
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In July, the Minneapolis Federal Reserve Bank will lose one of its most valuable, longtime leaders, when Niel Willardson retires after 31 years of service, including 17 years as senior vice president and general counsel.

Willardson has led the bank’s supervision, regulation, and credit division, and also the system’s staff development subcommittee, training thousands of bank examiners. He has also overseen the financial management group, serving as the bank’s CFO; the payments, standards, and outreach group; community development; and served as the corporate secretary. He served the Board of Governors as a deputy director and interim general counsel for the office of employee benefits.

During his tenure, Willardson has helped lead the Minneapolis Fed through two major crises: the 2008-2009 financial meltdown and the recent COVID-19 pandemic.

In the early days of the pandemic, he led the legal team that implemented the Paycheck Protection Program Liquidity Facility, which provided more than $208 billion in liquidity to about 900 financial institutions nationwide.

One of Willardson’s most effective recent contributions — to the entire Federal Reserve system — was taking the lead in implementing a new policy requiring all Minneapolis bank employees to be vaccinated or receive an accommodation. In July, 2021, the Minneapolis Fed became the first of 12 regional Federal Reserve banks to publicly announce a vaccine requirement policy.

“It was good to be in that position to support all of the other banks,” he says.

Willardson has been part of the Bank’s mentoring program for the past 20 years. “Earlier in my career, I was really fortunate to work with and learn from a lot of really great people and had a lot of support. So, ‘giving back’ is the least I can do,” says Willardson, who plans to continue working as an adjunct professor at the University of Minnesota Law School and as a fellow in the U’s Law and Economics Institute.

In 2017, Willardson played a major role in establishing the bank’s employee resource networks, which are employee-led affinity groups designed to promote leadership and inclusivity.

—Dan Emerson

In 2017, Bloodhart was promoted to general counsel of the Metropolitan Council, replacing her mentor, Don Mueting, who retired. She oversees a team of six attorneys, two assistants and outside counsel when needed. On any given day, she may address issues as broad as the Green Line extension, affordable housing, and sewer construction and industrial waste.

That’s in addition to advising the council on open meeting laws, data practices and all the legal areas that pertain to governmental bodies.

“This law doesn’t fit within any particular practice area. I am a real generalist,” Bloodhart says. “I like to say now that I feel like I’m two miles wide and an inch deep. I have the privilege to work with a really talented group of attorneys who are subject matter experts, and who are in the weeds on all of these various projects.”

It’s not the career she imagined for herself, but she says between her time at the attorney general’s office and now at the Metropolitan Council, it has been tremendously rewarding to play a significant role in issues such as development of the Twin Cities light rail system, affordable housing and environmental concerns.

—Paul Nolan
CONGRATULATIONS!

Fox Rothschild congratulates the Honorees of

Minnesota Lawyer’s In-House Counsel Awards.

We applaud each of you and your teams in addressing the legal needs of your organizations.
Laura Graf became the Ryan Companies’ chief legal officer in 2020 after working in private law firms and focusing on commercial real estate issues for nearly two decades.

“I had worked with Ryan team members for many years before joining the company, and I admired the caliber of the work, the employees and the leadership,” Graf says. “The things that drove me to an in-house position were the chance to be part of the business instead of being an outside consultant.”

Graf came to Ryan after being a partner at Dorsey and Whitney for nearly four years in a career that includes working for Lindquist & Veenum, Barnes & Thornburg LLP and Parsinen Kaplan Rosberg & Gotlieb PA. Part of her focus at Ryan, and in past positions, has been to make the “request for proposal” (RFP) process more inclusive to attract a varied group of legal providers.

Rather than rely on diversity statistics available on law firms’ websites, Graf seeks information on how legal partners would offer Ryan a diverse slate of attorneys through the RFP and interviews. In addition, she wants to learn how senior partners view diversity as a long-term business solution for clients.

“This is top of mind for me,” Graf says. “It’s something that I’ve been striving for. We need more diversity and equity in the practice of law, which is historically and currently still pretty much behind the curve.”

The attorney said she initially had plans to practice law for a few years and then go into teaching it. That didn’t happen because Graf found the work gratifying and interesting, although she might teach in retirement. “I love being engaged with the senior leadership and understanding how they’re making decisions and guiding the business, and I love the variety,” she says.

—Frank Jossi
Corporate legal work is frequently touted as offering a better work-life balance, and, here and there, Renee Jackson has found that to be true. But she can attest that corporate law has its moments of high stress and long hours.

Jackson has split her 30-plus years as a lawyer almost in half between litigation work for Twin Cities law firms and working as in-house counsel for a variety of Twin Cities businesses. There have been career highlights from both worlds, she says. Her first 15 years as a litigator for prominent firms prepared her in many ways for her subsequent 17 years in the corporate world.

Law firm litigation "teaches you a lot of great lessons for in-house counsel work, including being calm under pressure, focusing on strategy and being detail-oriented. It prepared me well for the second half of my career," Jackson says.

She landed her current position as general counsel at Bloomington-based Jostens last year. She leads a team of three other lawyers and says the current work presents a wide variety of legal issues focused on helping the business at all stages — from brand enhancements to digital innovations, from strengthening the employee base to contracts with business partners, and most importantly, assisting the executive team with growth strategies as the company emerges from a challenging two pandemic years.

Previous in-house counsel stints included serving as general counsel for Young America LLC, Capella Education Company and The Dolan Company, and as associate general counsel for Fair Isaac Corp. Jackson repeatedly found herself helping companies during transformational phases, which at times meant that a job well done led to having no job, as when she helped Capella successfully merge with Strayer Education and assisted Dolan in selling its business lines.

She likes where she’s at and what she’s doing. “As a trial lawyer, I was fighting problems that happened between two companies four or five years in the past,” she says. “In-house counsel work allows me to be more proactive and resolve issues in real time. That’s a satisfying way to make a difference.”

—Paul Nolan
Starkey Legal Department

From a legal standpoint, recent years at the Starkey Laboratories have been dynamic. An embezzlement case sent company executives to prison, shaking the 55-year-old producer of hearing aids. Into that breach has stepped Starkey’s legal team. While helping to navigate the company through a federal investigation, the group, led by Thomas Ting, also helped Starkey maintain strong business performance.

The team’s functions cover commercial, intellectual property, operations, information technology and employment.

The commercial team is led by Chul Kwak; IT and intellectual property management, Jeff Cook; human resources, Emily Ruhsam; and regulatory and operations, Josh Strom; colleagues say that Ting rebuilt the legal department virtually from the ground up. With some help from outside counsel, Ting and his team resolved several high-profile legal disputes in 2021, including a class-action claim related to Starkey’s employee stock ownership plan, a move resulting from the financial fraud problems of the past.

The legal department also implemented an IP portfolio management strategy, a global compliance program, a legal governance strategy and a new real estate function.

The team, through a cross-functional engagement strategy (IP, regulatory, marketing, supply chain) helped support the successful launch of a new artificial intelligence-powered line of hearing aids known as Evolv.

Working with Starkey’s human resources team, chief health officer and president/CEO, the legal team, principally Ruhsam, has effectively managed various COVID-related initiatives. Those have included a $1,000 vaccine incentive for U.S.-based employees, a safe return to campus, a flexible work plan, employee communications and education on health-agency guidance.

For his part, Ting provides legal support to various departments of Starkey. Not only has he restructured, assembled and managed a legal department, he also provides direct support to the board of directors, chairman/CEO, president and the company’s executive leadership team.

—Dan Heilman

Kathy Bray
SFM Companies

In her 14 years at SFM Companies, Kathy Bray has shown great versatility. She started in the company’s insurance division as senior defense counsel, graduating to corporate counsel in 2016. Three years ago she was named SFM’s chief legal officer and corporate secretary.

Bray leads the company’s legal strategy and manages SFM’s public policy efforts, compliance team and its in-house law firm, Lynn, Scharfenberg & Hollick.

“I was in private practice for more than 15 years, and SFM was one of my clients,” Bray says. “I just liked how they did business. There was very low turnover, and their employees seemed happy.”

Among Bray’s other responsibilities are corporate and board governance, oversight of employment law issues, contract review, regulatory matters and legislative relationships. She also has authority over SFM’s Special Investigation Unit.

Bray graduated cum laude from the University of Minnesota Law School and has her undergraduate degree in business from the University of Denver.

Before joining SFM, Bray was a shareholder with Hanft Fride in Duluth. There she advised employers in workers’ compensation and employment matters, including disputes that involved the Americans With Disabilities Act, Family Medical Leave Act and other employment-related litigation.

“I like being in an atmosphere where everyone is working for the same client,” Bray says of the contrast between private practice and in-house work. “There are a lot of different facets to the work, but everyone has the same goal of helping the client succeed.”

Bray is currently co-leading SFM’s hybrid office project.

“We’re trying to find out what the next phase of work will look like,” she said. “It’s a chance for me to wear a business hat for a while and help the company with strategy.”

—Dan Heilman
Congratulations, Scott Lynch, on being recognized as an In-House Counsel Honoree.

We celebrate you for your dedication to our customers and community, and to ensuring access to quality, affordable care.
Spiwe Jefferson
Amplify Education

Spiwe Jefferson’s parents were college educators and administrators who emphasized the importance of education. That theme, which “really stuck with me,” led the native of Zimbabwe to her current position as deputy general counsel for Amplify Education Inc., a Brooklyn, New York-based provider of curriculum and assessment solutions for students in kindergarten through high school.

A 1993 graduate of the University of Dayton School of Law, Jefferson first came to the U.S. from Zimbabwe in 1975, returning there with her parents in 1977. About a decade later she returned to the U.S. to attend college.

In 2021, Jefferson was recruited to join Amplify from Minneapolis law firm Blackwell Burke, where she had made significant contributions as director of strategic planning.

In her first year with Amplify, Jefferson won the firm’s Bright Beginnings award for new employees who have had an immediate positive impact.

Jefferson says what she likes most about working at Amplify is that “we are wholly committed to providing high quality education, and not just to kids who live in nice suburbs. This organization really does care about making sure all children have access to a quality education.”

Jefferson has been a longtime professional mentor, both formally and informally, to younger colleagues, to provide them “the kind of growth opportunities I have had,” she says. Jefferson also participates in the Amplify and Corporate Counsel Women of Color mentor programs, in addition to informally mentoring young professionals.

Her other volunteer causes have included Aeon Homes, Iowa Homeless Youth Centers, Dayton Pro Bono program, the Volunteer Lawyers Project, the American Bar Association, the Lewis Sports Foundation (teaching kids life skills through sports), serving as an investigator for the Hennepin County Fourth District and more.

In 2005, Jefferson became interested in mindful meditation through a former boss. She went on to become a certified mindfulness practitioner and coach, and authored a book providing five-minute meditation exercises for busy people. It is the first of a planned series of books.

—Dan Emerson

Mike Auger
Ever-Green Energy

Mike Auger got interested in the legal profession while bartending during college at a country club in his home state of South Dakota. Food company general counsel and country club member Sheila Hagen recognized Auger’s talent and suggested his skills could be applied to law — not just cocktails.

He believed her.

After law school at Rutgers University and a few resume-building jobs, Auger became counsel for U.S. Energy Services in Plymouth. The firm negotiated contracts between large clients and fuel suppliers. “It was a good introduction to the energy space,” he says. “They [the company] gave me a lot of opportunities to pursue education, both legal and nonlegal, to develop energy expertise.”

When the opportunity came in 2015 to work in renewable energy at Ever-Green Energy, he embraced it.

“The company aligned with where I thought things in the industry were going, and I liked the way Ever-Green approaches things and that it’s a mission-driven organization,” he says.

As vice president and chief legal, risk and governance officer, Auger gets involved in nearly every aspect of the business, from creating contracts to working through often dense financing arrangements. Ever-Green operates North America’s largest hot water district energy system, District Energy in St. Paul, and several other systems around the country, including Duluth.

The company also has projects to build geothermal heating at Oberlin College in Ohio, and in San Francisco, where bay water will be used for a district system covering millions of square feet in the emerging Mission Bay neighborhood. In addition, Auger said Ever-Green developed a template that includes first-of-its-kind financing through the California Pollution Control Agency that is attracting interest from three or four other California locations.

Auger loves the variety his job offers. “Every day is different,” he says. “At Ever-Green, I get to work with some of the most incredibly talented people I’ve ever met, and they inspire me.”

—Frank Iossi
As Minneapolis-based U.S. Bank has steadily grown in size and assets, its international operations have also expanded. Senior vice president and chief employment counsel Ilyse Goldsmith has played a major role in helping the bank grow and thrive globally.

After working at Minneapolis-based Dorsey and Whitney, Goldsmith joined the bank in 2006 to serve as an adviser on the employment law team, which then consisted of just two attorneys. Since then, the team has grown to 12 legal professionals under the leadership of Goldsmith, a Northwestern University Law School graduate.

For years, U.S. Bank used only outside counsel to handle employment law issues outside the U.S. But Goldsmith has recently been engaged in expanding the bank’s international employee support function. These are eventful times for U.S. Bank, which made its first major acquisition (Union Bank) in a number of years, Goldsmith says. “There are many employee-related issues connected to (doing business internationally). People in this industry feel strongly connected to their jobs, and we want to do what we can to preserve their good feelings toward their employer.”

Generally speaking, laws on the continent are “very protective of employees, with a lot more processes in place for actions we may be taking with respect to our employees,” she says. “Each country obviously has its own heavily regulated environment.”

Goldsmith appreciates the way her roles have evolved in her 16 years at U.S. Bank. “One thing that’s really gratifying about what I do is that there’s always something new to learn; and, we’re always asking ‘How can we do it better?’”

In her non-working hours, Goldsmith has been a committed volunteer to several local organizations. She advises the COO and legal team of Fraser, a Minneapolis-based provider of autism and mental health services. She has also provided major assistance to Herzl, an overnight camp attended by her children, serving on the board of directors and executive committee, and advising staff on human resource issues. She’s also volunteered at the Volunteer Lawyer Network Access Point clinic, and volunteers with her kids at Feed My Starving Children.

—Dan Emerson
**Ben Omorogbe**  
**Travelers Companies**

After making partner at the former Gray Plant Mooty firm (now Lathrop GPM), Ben Omorogbe found his services in demand. He eventually settled on what was then the St. Paul Companies, now known post-merger as Travelers Companies.  

“I like the stability of the company,” says Omorogbe, who has been practicing law for more than 26 years. “The people are great, and I enjoy the role I have here.”

As group general counsel, Omorogbe has several roles at Travelers, including leading lawyers and legal professionals in product development, coverage analysis, risk control and an area that’s been in the news a lot lately: trade and economic sanctions.  

“It’s a wide range of issues we deal with,” he says. “A good example is what we’re going through now with Russia and Ukraine. As a U.S. company with a global footprint, we have to navigate a lot of laws and regulations to make sure that we are in full compliance with the laws of the United States and other regions.”

Omorogbe has mentored more than 100 lawyers and students, some of whom have become law firm partners, district court judges and business executives. He is the benefactor of a scholarship at Mitchell Hamline School of Law and has offered scholarships to about a dozen law students in the past decade.

Omorogbe also was a founding corporate executive member of Twin Cities Diversity in Practice as a representative of Travelers. And he’s on the board of the Economic Club of Minnesota, which offers a nonpartisan platform for leaders in business, government and public policy on how Minnesota can better compete in the global economy.

“I love my work, but mentoring young lawyers and law students is the activity I’m most proud of,” Omorogbe says.

—Dan Heilman

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**Eric Rucker**  
**3M**

Eric Rucker was a veteran litigator in private practice, spending the first 22 years of his career at Briggs & Morgan (now Taft). The move to an in-house role was a seamless one.

“The job opened up, and a colleague of mine who was in 3M’s legal department said to me, ‘This would be perfect for you,’” Rucker recalls.

He came to 3M in 2015, and is now vice president, associate general counsel, litigation. Rucker is the longest-standing member of the litigation department as well as one of the most senior leaders.

For most of his time at 3M, Rucker has managed the mass-tort docket. That has meant creating a virtual law firm to handle 3M’s respirator defense work. The trial team he put together has won 17 out of 18 trials over the years.

Among other things, Rucker managed the defense of the largest multidistrict litigation in U.S. history. The 3M Combat Arms Earplug Products Liability Litigation consisted of about 280,000 lawsuits pending against 3M in the federal court system. Last year he managed nine bellwether trials in the Northern District of Florida. 3M won four of these bellweathers, even though the plaintiffs voluntarily dismissed 3M’s strongest cases in the bellwether pool before they reached trial.

At the moment, he’s managing multidistrict litigation around 3M’s Combat Arms earplugs. At dispute is whether defects in the earplugs led to hearing loss for combat veterans. “The breadth of the work I do beyond litigating — strategy and preparation — is refreshing,” he says. “I manage outside counsel, work with our corporate finance groups and deal with the business themselves.”

Rucker is also chair of 3M’s Legal Affairs Diversity and Inclusion Committee, as well as being a longstanding member (and former co-chair) of Twin Cities Diversity in Practice.

—Dan Heilman
Alexandria Reyes Schroeder

After graduating from Wake Forest University Law School in 2009, Alexandria Reyes Schroeder entered the specialty of financial services litigation during a very eventful period. In the wake of the 2008-2009 financial crisis, lawmakers and regulators took major action intended to help prevent such a major meltdown from ever happening again.

The new regulatory climate steepened the learning curve for that sector of the legal profession. As a young litigator, first with an Atlanta law firm, then one in Minneapolis, Reyes Schroeder gained experience and expertise that serves her well in her subsequent career.

Since the passing of the landmark Dodd-Frank Bill, “we have had to adjust to a new legal framework, a more regulated environment, and make sure we are responsive not only to regulators, but also customers,” she says.

Since Reyes Schroeder joined Wells Fargo in 2019, being an in-house counsel has enabled her to “be on the front end of trying to prevent regulatory issues before they arise. Rather than reacting, we have the opportunity to be proactive and preemptive.”

Reyes Schroeder has taken the opportunity to impart some of the expertise and insight she has gained to younger people as an adjunct professor at the University of Minnesota Law School (she is currently on maternity leave). Her teaching focuses on “those practical skills you develop when you start working.”

As a teacher, she also enjoys mentoring law students and providing career guidance. As a person of color, she can also be a role model for younger people of color following in her footsteps as an active member of the Minnesota Association of Black Lawyers.

In contributing to the community as a volunteer, Reyes Schroeder’s favorite commitment is supporting the educational foundation developed by her St. Paul high school, St. Paul Central. The St. Paul Central Educational Foundation provides more than $100,000 in scholarship aid each year. She also helped raise more than $200,000 to endow a scholarship in the memory of her late classmate Philando Castile, who was killed by police in 2016.

—Dan Emerson

Larkin Hoffman is delighted to congratulate Sarah Whiting, In-House Counsel at Allete, for her recognition by Minnesota Lawyer as a “2022 In-House Counsel Honoree.”
Emily Wessels
General Mills

Like many high achievers, Emily Wessels embraces challenges and doesn’t shy away from putting herself in new situations. It was a contributing factor in her decision to leave her associate position in the Minneapolis office of Merchant & Gould in March 2019 for an in-house counsel role at General Mills.

The move came with a change in focus from intellectual property litigation to a cornucopia of new legal responsibilities at Golden Valley-based General Mills. “I feel like it’s surprises every day, just because you don’t know what’s going to come at you,” she says.

Wessels has been asked to become a generalist, working on legal issues as diverse as advertising and marketing claims, to supporting G-Works, the company’s recently launched corporate venture studio.

She was offered the job at General Mills after handling some IP matters for the company while at Merchant & Gould. Wessels, who earned her J.D. at the University of Minnesota Law School, said one attraction of the in-house position was the opportunity to “fill in some skill and knowledge gaps” that she had noticed while working almost entirely on IP matters at the firm.

“I felt pretty well settled with the parameters in which I was working” at Merchant & Gould, she says. “I haven’t achieved that level of comfort in my in-house practice, and I’m starting to think maybe I never will. Maybe I never want to, because once you’re there, you stop growing and stop taking on new challenges.”

One thing that hasn’t changed is her commitment to pro bono work. Since starting her legal career, Wessels has been an advocate for individuals who need immigration and asylum representation. It’s not uncommon for lawyers to face new challenges by doing pro bono work when they transition to corporate law, but Wessels says the cases are too rewarding not to stick with it. She serves on the board of the Advocates for Human Rights, where she gets her clients. She also is an adjunct professor in the University of Minnesota Law School Moot Court program, where she teaches IP Moot Court and has coached the IP Moot Court competition team.

“Sometimes, I feel out over my tips,” she admits, “but that’s when I take the time to remind myself it’s why I took this job. I like getting challenged. And I like that no day is the same.”

—Paul Nolan

Sarah Whiting
ALLETE Inc.

In her in-house attorney role at ALLETE Inc., an energy company that serves the Upper Midwest, Sarah Whiting supports the environmental and land management department, which includes both environmental and real estate matters. She also provides legal counsel regarding tax, solar development, renewable energy financing, bankruptcy and SEC-related matters.

“When the execution of ALLETE’s sustainability in action strategy,” she says, “my solar development and renewable energy financing practices have grown significantly. And I am proud to be a part of that effort.”

Prior to joining ALLETE in 2019, Whiting, who earned her J.D. in 2011 from Harvard Law School, worked as an attorney at Members Cooperative Credit Union in Duluth for more than three years. Before that, she worked as an associate at Lindquist & Vennum in Minneapolis.

An especially rewarding career experience came right out of law school, she says, when she served as a law clerk to the Honorable G. Barry Anderson, associate justice of the Minnesota Supreme Court. “It was an honor to serve my home state of Minnesota, and it was a great confidence-booster early in my career to work on several cases that involved issues of first impression with a statewide impact.”

Whiting says her work at ALLETE provides her a strong sense of purpose and personal growth.

“One reason I joined ALLETE was because I value the company’s commitment to sustainability and delivery of clean energy solutions,” she says. “I continue to be impressed by the talent of the employees and the complexity of the work. It’s a place where I will continue to learn new things and gain new skills, especially since the energy industry is in a period of transformation.”

As a Duluth native, Whiting is happy to return to her roots. “I feel very lucky to be able to work on challenging and impactful issues near my family and surrounded by the natural beauty of the Duluth area.”

—Paul Nolan
RISING STAR
Ben Maloney
phData Inc.

For someone barely a decade into his career, Robert Maloney has experienced an array of legal worlds. Maloney is currently corporate counsel at phData, a Minneapolis-based company that provides companies nationwide with technology consulting services.

His biggest project involved the construction of an office with a microgrid that included solar panels, small wind turbines, energy storage and a combined heat and power system. The OATI Microgrid Technology Center went on to win two real estate awards. “That was my focus, driving that project along,” he says.

His introduction to law came when he took a legal course as part of a business degree program at the University of Iowa. Graduating in 2009, with finance jobs hard to find, Grannon decided to attend law school. The desire to work in commercial real estate emerged during his time at OATI.

“I decided after helping create the microgrid center that this was something I wanted to pursue, and I began looking for different options that would allow me more exposure to real estate,” he says. The position at Sherman Associates fits that aspiration perfectly.

—Frank Jossi

RISING STAR
Ben Grannon
Sherman Associates

ne of the interesting projects Ben Grannon recently worked on involves Moment, a new Sherman Associates’ apartment building that shares a city block with Thrivent’s downtown Minneapolis corporate headquarters.

Sherman Associates bought the property from Thrivent as part of a deal to share underground parking and to ensure the construction of a skyway between the two buildings. The 222-unit apartment building, now under construction, will include retail space featuring a day care center and an office and transitional burn recovery center of Firefighters for Healing, an organization that assists burn victims.

“We did a lot of work with them to make sure that the block operates as one, essentially,” including agreements for shared access, operations and parking, Grannon says.

Grannon, Sherman’s assistant general counsel, has gotten used to complex commercial real estate projects during his four years at the firm and jobs earlier in his career. After graduating cum laude from Mitchell Hamline School of Law, he served as the attorney for Open Access Technology International Inc. (OATI), an energy software developer.

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Sherman Associates

ne of the interesting projects Ben Grannon recently worked on involves Moment, a new Sherman Associates’ apartment building that shares a city block with Thrivent’s downtown Minneapolis corporate headquarters.

Sherman Associates bought the property from Thrivent as part of a deal to share underground parking and to ensure the construction of a skyway between the two buildings. The 222-unit apartment building, now under construction, will include retail space featuring a day care center and an office and transitional burn recovery center of Firefighters for Healing, an organization that assists burn victims.

“We did a lot of work with them to make sure that the block operates as one, essentially,” including agreements for shared access, operations and parking, Grannon says.

Grannon, Sherman’s assistant general counsel, has gotten used to complex commercial real estate projects during his four years at the firm and jobs earlier in his career. After graduating cum laude from Mitchell Hamline School of Law, he served as the attorney for Open Access Technology International Inc. (OATI), an energy software developer.

His biggest project involved the construction of an office with a microgrid that included solar panels, small wind turbines, energy storage and a combined heat and power system. The OATI Microgrid Technology Center went on to win two real estate awards. “That was my focus, driving that project along,” he says.

His introduction to law came when he took a legal course as part of a business degree program at the University of Iowa. Graduating in 2009, with finance jobs hard to find, Grannon decided to attend law school. The desire to work in commercial real estate emerged during his time at OATI.

“I decided after helping create the microgrid center that this was something I wanted to pursue, and I began looking for different options that would allow me more exposure to real estate,” he says. The position at Sherman Associates fits that aspiration perfectly.

—Frank Jossi
A Round of Applause
for In-House Counsel Award Winners!

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