

WEDNESDAY, MAY 24, 2017

MoFo adds intellectual property litigators from Wilson Sonsini

By Nicolas Sonnenburg
Daily Journal Staff Writer

Morrison & Foerster LLP has scooped up a six-attorney intellectual property team from its Bay Area competitor Wilson Sonsini Goodrich & Rosati PC.

Partners Stefani E. Shanberg and Jennifer J. Schmidt, of counsel Robin L. Brewer, and associates Eugene Marder, Madeleine Elizabeth Greene and Michael Guo will be in Morrison & Foerster's San Francisco office, according to a statement the firm issued on Tuesday.

The move is part of an effort to further strengthen Morrison Foerster's intellectual property litigation practice in a competitive Silicon Valley legal market, according to Richard S.J. Hung, who co-chairs the practice unit.

"Over the last few years, there has been consolidation in the market for intellectual property lawyers," Hung said of the Bay Area market. "IP is one of our core strengths, and there is great talent out there. We wanted to make our San Francisco office even stronger as the place where the firm started decades ago."

Shanberg said that Morrison & Foerster's IP practice was an offer that was "too good to pass up."

"For the team, I wanted a place where they could grow and thrive," she said. "It's a wonderful group. We've been working together for a long time. Michael [Jacobs] and Richard [Hung] have so much respect in the community. It is a perfect cultural fit."

Michael A. Jacobs is the other co-chair of the firm's intellectual property practice group.

Shanberg, whose practice is focused in Silicon Valley, noted that the team's move is especially timely in light of the U.S. Supreme Court's recent decision in *TC Heartland LLC v. Kraft Foods Group Brands LLC*, 2017 DJDAR 4633 (U.S. Ct. May 22, 2017), which places limits on where plaintiffs may bring patent infringement cases, making forum-shopping more difficult.

The court's opinion, which was delivered on Monday, has many speculating that plaintiffs bringing infringement cases will be driven out of the Eastern District of Texas to Delaware and the Bay Area, where many large companies are incorporated or headquartered.

Shanberg echoed these opinions, saying that decision would likely bring more litigation to the Northern District of California, the team's home turf.

Wilson Sonsini's goals for its IP litigation practice remain unclear.

In 2011, Wilson Sonsini lost six IP litigators to Latham & Watkins LLP's San Francisco and Menlo Park offices, but then hired four IP specialists from Sidley Austin LLP in 2013 to open a Los Angeles office.

"One does not hear too much about a Wilson Sonsini LA office," said Sandy Lechtick, a legal recruiter and president of Esquire Inc., explaining that the firm is known mostly as a corporate powerhouse and that its IP practice primarily services its corporate clients.

"Most people would be even surprised to hear that it has one," he added. "It's a pretty

small office."

Lyndon Parker, a legal recruiter and managing director of JD Search Advisors LLC, said that the problem could be an aging managerial issue.

"There seems to be a lack of managerial prowess in how they're handling certain lawyers," he said. "They're losing lawyers periodically."

Neither Shanberg nor Schmidt would comment on Wilson Sonsini's IP practice and neither could confirm which clients are moving with them. But Shanberg did note that client reaction was positive and that many were excited about the move.

They both said that they had nothing but positive things to say about their former firm.

Larry Watanabe, a legal recruiter and founding partner of Watanabe Nason LLC in Solana Beach who orchestrated the move, said the hires were really about finding a cultural fit.

"Morrison's IP practice is one of the most highly regarded in the country," Watanabe said in an email. "We had undertaken an in-depth and extensive effort to identify the right partner(s) to join MoFo's marquee IP litigation practice."

"It became immediately clear we had found the perfect match. Stefani, Jennifer and their team are true superstars and fit perfectly with the MoFo's practice and culture," Watanabe added. "The group has represented many of the hottest technology companies in high-stakes dispute matters."

A representative from Wilson Sonsini did not immediately respond to a request for comment.