

WASHINGTON BUSINESS JOURNAL

September 21-27, 2007



JOANNE S. LAWTON

Sources Revealed | Peg Warner

Trying cases

Peg Warner has always loved being a lawyer, despite handling sensitive cases. The head of McDermott Will & Emery LLP's trial department in D.C. has represented insurance companies in the clergy sexual-abuse scandal. She has also advised an insurer caught up in the post-Sept. 11 restoration of Manhattan.

In the clergy sexual-abuse scandal, a resolution was reached in July regarding lawsuits in California. What was it like working on this case? It was absolutely one of the most difficult matters I've worked on. It was emotionally a difficult situation because of the nature of claims alleged by the plaintiffs. It was a very complicated matter because it involved insurance issues and tort issues that went back 50 years.

You've served as principal adviser to an insurance company funded by \$1 billion of federal money to provide insurance to New York and the private sector after Sept. 11. How did Sept. 11 change things?

9/11 presented so many different issues for the insurance market. Clearly, for each and every client, it was obvious we all had to pay attention to the effect of the event on the way we do business in the future. My representation of this entity in many ways was a pulling together of all the disparate experiences I've had in my career. That's why it was challenge and rewarding at the same time. Our [clients] are a wide range of companies and others. All of the issues relate to mass tort litigation.

Why did you become a lawyer? I was very interested in doing litigation, and I thought it would be intellectually stimulating.

What makes a good lawyer? Raw intelligence. The ability to be creative in fashioning solutions

for clients. And a true enjoyment of what you're doing.

What makes a good litigator? Intelligence and creativity. You have to love the litigation process and like analyzing clients' problems, writing briefs and arguing in court. It's a challenging but fun experience. I try to really understand what my clients' objectives are and what their needs are. I try to be practical.

What's the biggest misconception about lawyers? From the public — that they're soulless. The best lawyers have deep souls. The bond between a lawyer and client can be extremely close.

What do you like most and least about being a lawyer? My least favorite part is some of the administrative aspects. My most favorite part is solving a problem for a client in a formidable way. And trying a case and winning.

How do you feel about first-year associates at D.C. law firms earning \$160,000 a year or more? I will say this. Our clients demand the most sophisticated legal services. They don't send us simple cases. We need to have the best lawyers to handle these problems, who can tackle them effectively and efficiently.

How difficult is it to retain talent? It's one of the most important challenges that a firm needs to face. Especially in a place like Washington. Firms here are very sophisticated. All firms need to do a better job of retaining talented women.

What frustrates you? Certain things I edit out of documents. Grammatical mistakes. Redundancies. Split infinitives. A big pet peeve of mine is lawyers who are not concise.

How do you balance work and family? I like to think I'm efficient. I like to think that I get to the point immediately. Getting to work early is key.

If you weren't a lawyer, what would you be doing? I would be a full-time mother and a history professor. I am very interested in Tudor English history.

You grew up in Northern Vermont. What was that like? It's pretty good when you spend all summer on a clear, glacial lake and all winter on a ski valley.

What was your first job? I was a night manager at a McDonald's in northern Vermont, so I could play golf all day. I learned a lot. The responsibility of running a business and supervising other people. What customers really want.

Any hobbies? I used to play a lot of golf. I was a solid eight handicap. Now I spend my free time going to my children's school and sporting events.

Favorite golf course? My favorite course is Orleans Country Club in northern Vermont. It's a classic course built in the 1920s.

I hear you're passionate about the Boston Red Sox. Have you been to any big games? I love the Red Sox. I went with my 83-year-old father to the second game of the World Series in 2004. Curt Schilling pitched. It was the bloody sock game. When the Red Sox won the World Series, it was one of the most incredible experiences of my life.

■E-MAIL: NADLER@BIZJOURNALS.COM ■PHONE: 703/258-0825