



■ SARAH M. HOFFMAN, JANINE M. LOETSCHER, JESSICA L. KLANDER, KELLY A. PUTNEY AND LEAH CEECE O. BOOMSMA

BASSFORD REMELE

Hiring the Partners of the Future

BY H. K. WILSON

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orporations are increasingly demanding diverse representation from their outside counsel. In 2017, HP announced that it would begin penalizing law firms that failed to meet its diversity benchmarks by withholding a portion of fees. Other

large companies in the U.S. and the U.K. have followed suit. The demand comes in response to multiple studies revealing that women and other minority groups continue to earn less and occupy fewer leadership roles in law firms worldwide. Recognizing that diverse legal teams provide more innovative and varied solutions to their legal problems, companies are using their buying power to reform big law.

But there are firms where diversity is more than policy or PR — diversity is in their DNA. Approaching its 140th year in service to justice in Minnesota, Bassford Remele considers diversity, equity and inclusion integral to its

ability to deliver well-rounded legal counsel and advocacy to its business clients. The firm fosters an inclusive culture where differences are deemed assets and collaboration yields exceptional results.

According to *Minnesota Lawyer's* 2021 Largest Law Firms list, Bassford Remele is the 19th largest law firm in Minnesota. Its reputation for legal excellence, uncompromising ethics and diverse representation makes it the go-to counsel and litigation firm for major corporations and Fortune 500 companies. The same qualities have made the firm a lifelong career destination for many of its attorneys. And a number of those lifers are women.

Kelly A. Putney is a shareholder and serves as the firm's COO. She is also chair of the Bassford Remele Professional Liability Practice Group. Putney is a professional liability litigator who has successfully represented and counseled hundreds of health care providers, lawyers, insurance agents and brokers, real estate agents, architects and accountants. Her many accolades include recognition in *The*

Best Lawyers in America for professional malpractice law, personal injury litigation, medical malpractice law and legal malpractice law, including being named Lawyer of the Year for legal malpractice law-defense in Minneapolis for 2022. She has been selected as a Minnesota Super Lawyer and a Top 50 Female Minnesota Super Lawyer numerous times.

After being with the firm for nearly 30 years, Putney said, “The thing that first attracted me was that this was a place lawyers came to out of law school and stayed. We’re called ‘lifers’ here. Now I’m one of the older lawyers at the firm. I always wanted to be a trial lawyer, and that’s all we do. The firm has steadily grown over the years. But we’ve maintained a close-knit connection among all the shareholders.”

Jessica L. Klander is a shareholder who serves on Bassford Remele’s board of directors and is co-chair of its recruiting committee. Her practice focuses on defending businesses and professionals against liability and malpractice claims. She is also experienced in complex litigation, employment law, non-compete disputes and class action lawsuits. Klander was just named among the Best Lawyers Ones to Watch for commercial litigation and professional malpractice law for the second consecutive year.

As she was beginning her law career, Klander set up coffee interviews with lawyers from various firms. “I heard a lot about Bassford and how wonderful the people were, how much they were respected in the community. I knew I wanted to go to a place I could grow old at — a home. I was lucky to get hired as a clerk, and I stayed. Something that has always been important to me personally is the support at this firm. Litigation is time-consuming and stressful. People here stand behind you. They’ve done it for me when I needed it. I have a great deal of loyalty to the firm for that. It’s much more than the place I work. These people are my best friends, my family and also my coworkers.”

Leah Ceece O. Boomsma is a shareholder whose practice centers on complex commercial litigation. She

brings more than a decade of experience in appeals, dispositive motion practice, expert collaboration and jury trials to a variety of business disputes. She represents businesses in personal injury, property damage and product liability defense. Prior to joining Bassford Remele, Boomsma clerked for both the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Eighth Circuit and for the Minnesota Supreme Court. She has been named among *Super Lawyer’s* Minnesota Rising Stars since 2019.

During her appellate clerkships, Boomsma discovered her passion for the academic and procedural aspects of law. After practicing with another large litigation firm, she joined Bassford Remele in 2020.

“The reason I was drawn here is because it is so close-knit,” she said. “It really matters in doing litigation. You have a lot of contentious relationships with opposing counsel, so it is important to me to have an internal environment that is supportive and encouraging, and where everybody laughs and celebrates victories. People here are always willing to stop and help or give advice.”

Janine M. Loetscher is a shareholder and co-chair of Bassford Remele’s insurance coverage practice group. She is also co-chair of the firm’s diversity, equity, inclusion team; co-chair of its associate development committee; and a member of its compensation committee. She is a litigator with substantial large-scale loss experience, whose practice focuses on construction, insurance coverage, products liability and personal injury matters. In 2021, Super Lawyers named her to its Minnesota Super Lawyers list.

Loetscher said that early in her career, she felt many of the female lawyers she encountered were not supportive of one another. Her proudest accomplishment as an attorney has been making things better for the next generation of female lawyers.

“I have dedicated my career to trying to help out the women coming behind me, whether it’s through mentoring, networking, helping get women access to opportunities, or fighting to change policies that detri-



KELLY A. PUTNEY



JESSICA L. KLANDER

mentally impact women.”

At Bassford Remele, she is part of a diverse and cohesive professional culture that is fully aligned with her goals and values. “I love my colleagues. I work with some of the most amazing lawyers, and more importantly, the most amazing female lawyers. They are inspiring, motivating, supportive and just plain fun. I am proud to tell people I work at Bassford.”

Sarah M. Hoffman is a shareholder, member of Bassford Remele’s board of directors and chair of its pro bono committee. As a health care litigator, Hoffman helps health systems, hospitals, clinics and individual providers navigate and prevent lawsuits, investigations, board proceedings and hearings. She regularly defends providers in multimillion-dollar birth injury cases, represents providers in licensing actions and counsels health care clients regarding various legal issues. Hoffman is also co-chair of the Minnesota Defense Lawyers

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Association medical liability and health care law committee.

Hoffman began her legal career working as a law clerk for Judge Shawn Moynihan in Dakota County, where she received excellent mentorship that prepared her for private practice. She joined Bassford Remele in 2013.

“I had long admired the firm,” she said, “so I was thrilled to have the opportunity to become one of its lawyers. I specifically remember seeing Bassford lawyers appear in court when I was a clerk, and I remember how professional and effective they were in court. I knew that I wanted to be part of a firm with those kinds of lawyers.”

In the past eight years, Hoffman has discovered that her instincts about the firm were absolutely correct. “One thing I really appreciate about the culture at Bassford is the sense of community and collegiality that I feel we have here. There have



JANINE M. LOETSCHER

been many times when I have faced a difficult legal issue, and I have been able to send an email, pick up the phone, or walk down the hall and ask for advice from my colleagues.”

MAJORITY SHAREHOLDERS

“At a lot of firms, there are only a few shareholders at the top. We’re the opposite,” Klander said. “We have a lot of shareholders and not as many associates. Our goal when we hire associates is that they will become shareholders. There is a lot of investment and resources placed in associates to help them build their own practices. You get to choose what you want to do. Rather than hire for need, here we hire for future partners. We want to guide associates to help them find what they want to do and how to be successful on that path.”

Bassford Remele has long been a firm of mentors. When Putney first joined the firm in 1993, it was Rebecca Egge Moos who took her under her wing. “She was a trailblazer for female litigators in this town, especially in medical malpractice defense, where I’ve settled the majority of my practice. She taught me everything she knew about the practice and shared client relationships. We have institutional clients who have been with us for 40 years due, in part, to people like her who fostered those relationships and passed them on to younger lawyers. I would not be where I am if not for her being so generous with her time, clients and experience.”

Today, the firm offers a formal mentorship program designed to develop

young attorneys and guide them through the process of becoming a shareholder. “I had a strong mentor as an associate that I chose because of his ability to develop clients,” Klander said. “But there are so many mentors at the firm that I regularly reach out to for any number of things. And once you’re a shareholder, there’s a lot to learn on that side. There are always people to ask for help who have an eagerness to give it.”

The challenge goes beyond simply recruiting diverse lawyers — it extends to retaining them. And having diverse attorneys who are already succeeding gives others something to strive toward. “Bassford shows the path forward,” Boomsma said. “If you’re a younger woman and want to be a shareholder, you ask, ‘What does that look like?’ I see that example in Kelly and other people who are building that support structure. I think we’re ahead of the curve. It’s one of



SARAH M. HOFFMAN

the reasons I joined. I've been able to grow because of the priority put on making sure everybody gets experience. Having the chance to argue motions in court is not available at every firm. In the last year — even during COVID — I've had so many more of those experiences.”

UNAPOLOGETIC ABOUT PARENTHOOD

Attorneys at Bassford Remele also enjoy support for life outside the practice of law with 12 weeks of paid family leave and back-up childcare. When an employee's child is ill and unable to attend school or daycare, or if their regular childcare provider is unavailable, the employee can arrange for childcare through Bassford Remele's back-up childcare provider. This provision allows for urgent or planned center-based and in-home childcare.

“I am a mom, and I love being a mom,” Klander said. “I'm also a litigator, and I love being a litigator. There should be people in positions of lead-



■ LEAH CEE O. BOOMSMA

AT A GLANCE

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PRACTICE AREAS

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Organizational Liability For Sexual Misconduct/Abuse
Products Liability
Professional Liability/Claim Prevention
Real Estate Litigation
Trust And Estates Litigation

ership who are doing both — unapologetically doing both, successfully. It's possible for the business of law to adjust a little so we can all be great with our families and be great litigators. I'm a strong believer that after becoming a mom, I'm a much better litigator. I don't think most people think that. They think that somehow you step back from your career and are not as good. But they are missing the boat by not having the diversity of leadership in their firms, by not having more people from all different walks of life who can bring something to the table. I also want the people coming behind me to see that they can be successful and have a functioning, happy family.”

Bassford Remele likes to say it is one of the oldest firms in Minnesota. But being old doesn't mean it is antiquated. The firm continues to reinvest in itself and its future while evolving to meet the needs and expectations of its clients.

“We've recently revamped aspects of our shareholder track to be as inclusive as we can,” said Putney. “We want everybody to feel invested as owners or future owners of the firm and here for the longterm. The practice of law in 2021 is different than it ever was in the past. In three days, we took our entire firm remote during the pandemic. We've found that it works, and we can afford to be more flexible than we were before. As we open up again, our

hybrid system will allow people to work at home a good chunk of the time.”

Doing its part to help eradicate bias in the practice of law and society at large, Bassford Remele recently established a diversity scholarship at each of the three Minnesota law schools. The scholarship is intended for students from underrepresented and diverse populations (Black, Indigenous, People of Color, Latinx, Hispanic and LGBTQ+) as well as students with a disability that is covered by the ADA who are interested in litigation.

At Bassford Remele, there are strong women leading the firm at all levels. Klander said, “There is a partnership of people, both men and women, working together to promote women and people of color in the firm. It makes us better. I wouldn't want to work at any firm where that is not important. It's not just a few women pushing that agenda; it's important to all of us, because we believe it's crucial to the health of the firm.”

“As we are making changes, we are looking to the future,” Putney said. “We hope to be here for another 140 years, and that doesn't just happen. It takes being intentional about the future, continually striving to be better and not be stagnant. Part of that effort is the collective focus of all of our shareholders on issues of diversity and the success of women in the firm.”