

# Cole finds his niche leading Leclair Korona

By JIM BARG

For most of us, finding a niche can be something that takes years of stops and starts. This is especially true with the legal community, as there are plenty of paths would-be attorneys can go down before discovering their strengths.

Not so with Leclair Korona Vahey Cole LLP's new managing partner, Steven Cole.

Cole appreciates the fact that the firm is small and midsize, which allows for a laser focus that bigger firms wouldn't allow.

"We are a small to medium-size firm that concentrates its practice solely in litigation and dispute resolution," he says.

"It gives us an advantage of getting smart on the issues that we need to be smart on, being experienced and having good credentials because all of the partners have been out (in the community) for more than 20 years."

As Leclair Korona approaches its 10th birthday in November, the awards keep coming. Each partner — including Cole himself — earned Best Lawyers in America awards for their expertise, and young associates Stacey Trien and Robert Yawman have also been honored for their work.

Laurie Vahey works in insurance and personal injury, Paul Leclair focuses on construction and toxic tort litigation, and Mary Jo Korona's area is matters related to universities, tax assessments, and representing municipalities.

"It provides two advantages to us — we feel confident in the areas that we're practicing in, and it's nice for referrals from attorneys that practice in other areas," he notes. "We encourage partners and associates to find a niche that they really enjoy, want to become an authority in and pursue it."

As for Cole's own focus, he works in intellectual property and trade secret disputes.

"The commonality in those is that they relate to business, money and numbers. I kind of geek out about the financial services industry. I understand what a U-5 is, I know what an ADV is. If you talk to 99 percent of the lawyers in Rochester, they'd have to look some of those terms up.

"I've just dealt with them regularly over the last 15 to 20 years, and feel very comfortable understanding what the problem is, hopefully advising and representing a client to (help) solve those kinds of problems."

He was very busy in 2016, as the amount of cases he presented in front of state Supreme Court Justice Matthew Rosenbaum led the longtime Commercial Division judge to joke that Cole was his "number one customer."

After graduating from American University with a juris doctorate degree in law in 1988, the Rochester native worked with the Department of Labor before spending five and a half years working in Washington as a trial



Steven Cole is managing partner at Leclair Korona Vahey Cole LLC.

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attorney for the Justice Department.

From there, Cole came home to join what was then Woford and Associates in 1995, and eventually moved with his three partners to help found Leclair Korona in 2007.

Adjusting from federal cases to local ones wasn't easy, he notes.

"My first case in Rochester was

a small-claims matter for Rochester Telephone," he says. "The transition was to develop your own practice or to represent the people that were there."

Cole makes sure to represent local residents through his work with low-wage workers, having helped Monroe Volunteer Legal Services for eight

years and serving as the outgoing president of the board at the Worker Justice Center of New York.

"The rewarding part is being able to help people, whether it's a business or an individual—that's the goal at the end of the day."

*Jim Barg is a Rochester-area freelance writer.*