

MVP: Steptoe's Stephanie Sheridan

Law360 (December 11, 2018, 3:21 PM EST) -- Stephanie Sheridan, the head of Steptoe & Johnson LLP's retail and e-commerce practice group, has scored major victories in pricing suits and other class actions for big-name clients such as L.L. Bean, FedEx and REI, earning her a spot as one of Law360's 2018 Retail & E-Commerce MVPs.

HER BIGGEST ACCOMPLISHMENT THIS YEAR:

Sheridan has an impressive list of victories this year, including winning summary judgment for Stein Mart in a pricing class action, successfully defending FedEx Office in a suit alleging it violated consumers' privacy, and achieving dismissal of a suit over a change in the return policy at L.L. Bean.

However, Sheridan said her biggest accomplishment this year was moving her team from Sedgwick LLP, which is in the process of closing down following a wave of partner exits, to Steptoe. It's a transition she says has been remarkably smooth.

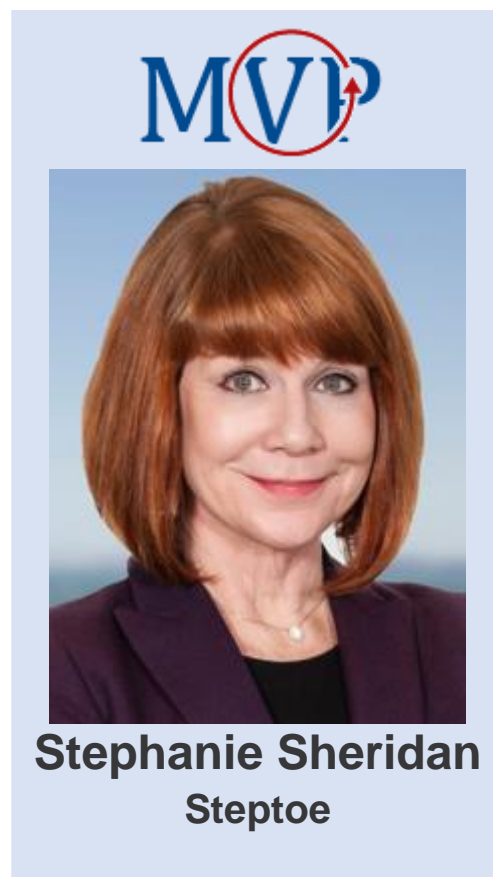
"I feel like the biggest accomplishment is not only coming over here, but how we've been able to integrate," she explained. "We had such a busy practice that continued to get busier."

It was also a big adjustment for her team, which includes 15 people between attorneys and staff.

"Most everyone with our practice team had been with our prior firm for all of our career, including my partner Anthony [Anscombe] and I, who started together 30 years ago," Sheridan said. "So it was an enormous change for all of us to move to a different firm."

The pair had several potential new homes to choose from but ultimately settled on Steptoe.

"Steptoe was a really good fit for us, with it being D.C.-based and having such a strong reputation in the



regulatory area and being so connected from a government-relations standpoint," Sheridan said. "That was really appealing to us. That was not something our team had before."

HER BIGGEST CHALLENGE:

Sheridan said the trickiest thing to navigate is the divide between traditional retail outlets and online retailers, both of which she represents. Sometimes new regulations or precedents are good for one client but bad for others, she said.

"There were a couple things this year that happened where you find that there's a development ... that's really good for brick-and-mortar but not for e-commerce companies," she said, adding that this comes up most often regarding requirements for online outlets to pay taxes.

"So that ends up being a hard line to walk, because we want to represent all of our clients equally and be happy for all of them when good results come out," she said. "But sometimes these two channels are diametrically opposed in certain areas. ... You're representing the industry, but sometimes the industry is not fully aligned on certain issues."

WHY SHE'S A RETAIL AND E-COMMERCE ATTORNEY:

Sheridan didn't start her career as a retail and e-commerce attorney, but as a commercial lawyer. After parts of the Fair and Accurate Credit Transactions Act went into effect in the mid-2000s, she began defending a few retail outlets against proposed class action suits for alleged violations of the act.

"We had some of those very first cases," she said. "So when I started seeing that all of these other retailers were getting targeted and I had developed a specialty as one of the first people who was handling these, I started just approaching retailers."

Once she started working with them, she began to get more and more interested in the industry.

"I just realized that retail was something, as an industry, that I was really interested in," Sheridan said.

HER ADVICE FOR JUNIOR ATTORNEYS:

Sheridan said the best thing for young attorneys to do is figure out what they're interested in and what type of law they want to practice. The key, she says, is finding something "that really gets you going, that you're really interested in, where reading up on things won't feel like a chore."

Part of what drives her is learning new things.

"I get paid for learning new things all the time, and I love that," she said. "But I love that far more when I'm learning new things in an area that interests me."

She adds, "I was the most miserable in my career when I was doing underground storage tank litigation. I don't understand how anyone can do that. But there are some environmental lawyers where that floats their boat."

Everyone just needs to find their niche, she said.

HER PRO BONO AND COMMUNITY WORK:

Sheridan serves on the board of governors at her law school, University of San Francisco, and on the national board for Legal Momentum, which advocates for the legal rights of women and girls. The organization focuses on an array of issues, including violence against women, equal access to education, and workplace rights.

“I feel very strongly about the work that they’re doing,” Sheridan said. “I think particularly now, in this political climate, that remains a vitally important area.”

She added, “I have three small kids. ... So I’m really committed to trying to make sure that I’m doing what I can to make the world that they’ll grow up in ... a good place and a safe place.”

— *As told to Emma Cueto*

Law360's MVPs are attorneys who have distinguished themselves from their peers over the past year through high-stakes litigation, record-breaking deals and complex global matters. A team of Law360 editors selected the 2018 MVP winners after reviewing nearly 1,000 submissions.

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