

KANSAS CITY BUSINESS JOURNAL

As general counsel, 'All of that fits under my umbrella. So it's a lot'

In January, Spencer Fane LLP created the position of general counsel, naming Leslie Greathouse to the role.

Greathouse joined Spencer Fane in 2008 to help set up a financial litigation department. Before that, she spent most of her career building a unique practice representing securitization trusts in class-action lawsuits, which became a booming business after the financial crisis of 2008.

Now, Greathouse is taking on the general counsel role, which includes being the firm's chief ethics officer, a role she's been groomed to take over for the past five years.

► Where are you from originally?

I'm originally from Lincoln, Neb. I'm a Midwesterner. I came to Kansas City in 1996, so I've been here long enough to feel like a Kansas Citian at this point.

I went to law school in California and then practiced out there for five years. My daughters were born in California, but I wanted to raise them as Midwesterners. ... I always loved Kansas City, so I located a job here and moved here. I've been thrilled to live here ever since.

► What got you interested in the law?

The first thing that made me really interested in law was reading "The Brethren" in high school. It's a Woodward and Armstrong book about the Warren Burger Supreme Court. My mom always jokes that she never knew I wanted to be a lawyer until she read a playbill in theater during my senior year in high school, and there was a little bio about me that said I planned to go to law school one day. My mom was like: "Really? I did not know this." That was the first time I ever put it into writing, and I sort of made it happen.

► Tell me about your practice.

My practice is litigation, mainly in the financial services area. I do a lot of class-action defense work. For a long time, I was known as the female in the middle of the United States who was a litigator that spoke securitization. So before few others



Leslie Greathouse is general counsel for Spencer Fane LLP.

knew what a securitization trust was, I was working on that. As early as 1999, I was doing that kind of litigation. I was representing the securitization trusts, the trustees and the various components. I did coordinating class-action counsel in a series of about 40 to 50 class actions nationwide, for a Fortune 200 company. It was what brought me into the business.

► Tell me about your new role.

I joke that my first job was to write my own job description. It was all new. Probably next January I'll have to rewrite it.

My job is establishing the general counsel duties that any company has. People report to me on contracts and employment issues, (Managing Partner) Pat Whalen or our executive committee ask for general advice on issues they have for me, and I manage claims or subpoenas the firm receives. ... I also work on compliance, security, both physical and cyber, and client audits are becoming a bigger deal. All of that fits under my umbrella. So it's a lot.

► Do you feel like you're breaking through a barrier for women as a general counsel?

I don't know of any other female general counsels at the bigger firms. ... Equity partnership for women in law firms nationwide is still only 19 percent. So when you realize you've only got one in five lawyers

who are female and in an equity position to take these kinds of roles, it shows how limited it is. So I feel like I'm on the cutting edge.

I hope other women are looking at me and saying maybe they should work to reach these types of roles. There certainly weren't many women in firm leadership roles until maybe 15 years ago. So I really hope young women are realizing that they should stay in the practice, reach for partnership and strive for leadership roles.

► What do you do for fun?

I do a lot of yoga. I started about eight years ago when I was going through a divorce, and I needed some mind and life balance. I've just become a complete fan of it, not just from an exercise perspective but the ability to calm down and forget everything for about an hour. So it's become an important part of life for me now.

I'm also an avid reader. Because I read so seriously at work, I tend to read more fiction and fluff types of books. Instead of watching a lot of TV, I prefer to settle down with a book that takes me someplace totally different and introduces me to people who are not real.

► When it comes to vacations, are you a meticulous planner or more spontaneous?

I have so much of my clients' business and the work of Spencer Fane meticulously planned that when it's time for a vacation, I tend to just buy a ticket, hopefully have a hotel room and then just figure things out and go with the flow. I wasn't always able to do that. I've learned to be less of a control freak about my personal life. Thank you, yoga.

— James Dornbrook

LESLIE GREATHOUSE

Title: General counsel, Spencer Fane LLP

Education: Bachelor's in political science, history and literature, University of Nebraska, 1987; law degree, University of San Diego, 1991

Family: Daughters, Mackenzie, 25, and Caitlin, 23

Hobbies: Yoga, reading fiction novels, travel