

# Chicago Daily Law Bulletin®

Volume 156, No. 77

Tuesday, April 21, 2010

## Attorneys mentor law students who want a career in the IP field

By Jerry Crimmins  
Law Bulletin staff writer

In a program that began just this year, 29 attorneys from law firms and companies that are members of the Chicago Intellectual Property Alliance are acting as mentors to 30 Chicago law students this semester.

One law student, Michael Brandt, 26, of Chicago-Kent College of Law, said it's easier to relate to a mentor from CIPA than it might be if the mentor were his boss.

"Absolutely it's helpful," he said.

Brandt's mentor is attorney Meggan Fitzgerald Duffy of Marshall, Gerstein & Borun LLP.

Duffy is one of seven attorneys from Marshall, Gerstein & Borun who volunteered to be mentors. She is one of the originators of CIPA's mentoring program.

The program gives lawyers an opportunity "to pass on their own successes and experiences, feel good about helping others, and to build their network a little bit," she said.

Even though the mentees are law students, "they will eventually be out in the intellectual property world," she said.

The Chicago Intellectual Property Alliance, founded in 2003, is made up of law firms, companies and law schools, said Michael B. Harlin of McAndrews, Held & Malloy Ltd., the group's president.

In its mission statement, CIPA promotes Chicago and the Midwest "as the intellectual property center for new ideas, programs and education."

The mentoring program makes lawyers "feel good to donate their time and help someone else" and gives them an opportunity for pro bono work in the IP field, Harlin said.

As Harlin and others have pointed out, "There aren't many opportunities for pro bono activities specific to the field of

intellectual property."

Six lawyers from McAndrews volunteered to be mentors. Harlin mentors a Chicago-Kent student, Patrick Bickley, who Harlin advises on "how to position yourself" in the job hunt.

"When employers are looking for patent attorneys, they want someone who is really interested in that rather than someone who's looking for any job," Harlin said.

He suggested his mentee join the IP law society at Kent. The two also discuss "different job possibilities in the IP field," "how to get the most out of the law school experience," and "about balancing work and family life," Harlin said.

The rules for the program specifically state: "The mentees should not expect that the program will lead to job offers or opportunities from the mentor."

Duffy said: "We don't want to put any burden on our mentors. It's a difficult job market right now."

Jeremy R. Kriegel of Marshall, Gerstein & Borun also is mentoring a local law student, Keith Syverson.

"I remember when I was in those shoes and not getting a lot of guidance on what it meant to be a practicing intellectual property attorney. ... I thought it was a good opportunity to help out a law student," Kriegel said.

"Both Keith and I received our undergraduate degrees from the University of Rochester in upstate New York. His degree is in molecular genetics, and mine is in mechanical engineering.

"We shared our experiences at the University of Rochester and talked about the IP landscape in the Chicago area."

CIPA matches the lawyers and the law students and tries to find common grounds.

Gina M. Bicknell of Marshall, Gerstein & Borun advised her mentee "to talk to as

many people as she can who are practicing both in law firms and industry because there are so many avenues people with technical backgrounds can go in, and patent law is one of them."

Bicknell and her mentee have a background in the biological sciences. They also discuss the Chicago theater scene. But in regard to theaters, Bicknell advised her mentee "to enjoy Chicago as much as possible while a law student and before getting into law."

Kent student Brandt and his mentor, Duffy, try to meet on a monthly basis — they "usually get lunch or something like that."

The rules require mentors to meet mentees at least once during the semester over a meal or coffee and "ideally" three times in an academic year. Two of the meetings can be by telephone.

Brandt tells Duffy about his law school experiences and asks her about law firm life and opportunities he's considering.

"It's not like a partner at a firm [if he were an associate] where I would be a little bit more leery about asking candid questions," Brandt said. "It's more like a friendly thing. I consider her a peer ..., even though she's a lot more experienced. ... I feel she would give me a straight answer on things, so I definitely value that aspect."

Other law firms and companies whose lawyers participate in the CIPA mentor program are: Barnes & Thornburg LLP; Fitch, Even, Tabin & Flannery; Hinshaw & Culbertson LLP; Husch, Blackwell, Sanders LLP; Katten, Muchin, Rosenman LLP; Loeb & Loeb LLP; Mandell, Menkes LLC; Miller, Matthias & Hull; Neal & McDevitt LLC; Pattishall, McAuliffe, Newbury, Hilliard & Geraldson LLP; Rakoczy, Molino, Mazzochi, Siwik LLP; and WellPoint, the health benefits company.