



Women Owned Law Member Spotlight Questionnaire

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Tell us about your firm including: history, specialization, and years in business.

JONES ROBB, PLLC, located in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area, is a boutique law firm specializing in patent legal services. Jones Robb focuses exclusively on providing legal services in the areas of patent preparation, U.S. Patent and Trademark Office proceedings, and IP-related counseling because of our belief that these areas are unique from various other legal practices, including patent litigation. Focusing firm resources on these services eliminates high overhead costs that can arise in general or litigation practice settings, allowing us to deliver exceptional value to our clients.

The Jones Robb patent practitioner team has the depth and breadth of a much larger firm. All of our attorneys are registered to practice before the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office, and many have experience in large law firms, in Fortune 500 legal departments, and/or as former patent examiners. Several of our attorneys have 5-10 years of patent experience, while the firm's partners average more than 20 years. Our staff also includes professionals who have dedicated and long careers in patent prosecution and docketing roles.

We have been serving clients since 2007 and the firm is certified as a women-owned business by the Women's Business Enterprise National Council (WBENC). Since its inception, the firm has grown to its current make-up of three partners, six associates, three patent legal assistants, two docketing specialists, an office administrator, and a bookkeeper. In addition, throughout the year and during the summer, Jones Robb's team includes several interns and part-time college or law students. Jones Robb continues to seek talented attorneys and staff to join its team and serve its current and expanding client base.

What's an interesting fact about you or your firm most people don't know?

As a small firm, we try to create fun traditions that harken back to the closer-knit communities that were prevalent in the workplaces of the past. One of our best traditions is our annual chili cookoff. Our current champion is in her second year of holding the crown, and this year submitted two entries which happened to win both first and second place. One year, we judged on the title of the chili as well as the best-tasting. The winner was "Method and System for Legume Delivery" (a little patent law humor).

What's a favorite moment of your career so far?

As I look back on my patent career, which is now approaching 25 years in the rear-view mirror, the relationships that I have had the privilege of developing are among the most rewarding to me. Starting my own law firm has allowed me to continue to develop attorney-client relationships, which are paramount to the practice of law, but also to expand to a network of other relationships that have been critical to the firm's success. These include relationships with m partners and other team members within our firm, suppliers and vendors of the firm, and other people who I have relied on for advice on running the firm over the years. Our firm celebrated its 10th year in business last year and it struck me that the majority of the clients that entrusted their work to me and a brand-new firm in those first couple of years the firm was in business are still clients of the firm today. I am so grateful for the opportunity those clients gave me then and continue to give our firm to this day. I value the mutual respect and trust developed with the individuals that I interact with in counseling those clients, and the longevity of those relationships is a favorite part of my profession and career.

What challenge are you most proud of overcoming?

Upon first founding the firm, I was referred a difficult case from my former firm that it was not able to handle because of conflicts. It was difficult because of procedural issues relating to joint rights in a patent application and a lack of precedent for how to proceed at the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office. It seemed that the outcome was heading toward losing rights to pursue the patent application based on the various parties' unwillingness to agree on a course of action, and the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office requiring all parties to agree to how the case would be prosecuted. The case required me to be creative in developing arguments on behalf of my client and creating a variety of potential avenues to pursue in view of the dearth of precedent in the area and not have a clear idea of how any one choice might pan out. Having come from a big firm, I had always had the luxury of consulting with others with years of experience for help in these uncharted areas—even if they didn't know the answer, they seemed to have the wisdom to understand that and counsel their clients accordingly. In addition to teaching me to be creative and to consider various legal solutions, the situation also taught me how to negotiate with adverse parties and how to help a client understand that making concessions could ultimately result in a win-win situation for both parties. Ultimately, this is what happened and we have since achieved many positive results for the client. This situation taught me to trust my own legal skills and judgment, even when answers and outcomes were not readily apparent.

Tell us about your morning ritual.

My relatively recent morning ritual is to ensure that I let our new puppy (8 months old Shih Tzu) out so that I can ensure his housetraining is not compromised. This generally occurs around 6 a.m. and it provides a great opportunity to get my coffee brewing and a shower in before anyone else in the house is awake. I then ring the alarm bells to wake up my two middle school age sons, and spend the next 20 to 30 minutes haranguing, feeding, and ushering them out the door to the bus. My husband helps with this process too and sometimes he takes over the dog/coffee duty. I then finish getting ready and head to the office. On Saturday mornings, I replace getting the kids out the door and myself to the office with an 8:30 a.m. Zumba class.

What advice would you offer new business owners?

My advice would be to ensure that what you represent you are able to deliver to a client/customer you actually deliver. As we all know, the first impression is generally a lasting impression. For this reason, it is important to meet the expectations that a client has when they make the decision to trust your new business with their work. It can be tempting to take on every opportunity that comes your way as a new business owner. But, if you do not have the requisite skills or resources for the project, be careful what you promise before you take on the work, and take heed to deliver what you represented if you do take on the work.

What do you wish you had known before starting your own business?

I wish I had had more knowledge of administrative and HR issues. I took those aspects of running a business for granted, with regard to both the time commitment and the skills/knowledge required to manage these areas of the business properly. I now realize how critical these areas are to any business – they are fundamental to running any business successfully, regardless of what the business is. I had to learn many of the skills in this area on the fly initially, learning mainly from mistakes made. Since then, I have spent many hours reading books to educate myself, as well as consulting with various business owners who have dealt with these issues. I think it is important to understand these areas if you are going to hire employees. I recommend considering an office administrator experienced in these areas as an early hire into the business if you will be hiring employees to be part of your business.

How can you help other WOL members improve their business?

WOL in and of itself is a great resource to connect members and is a wonderful resource for those looking to improve their business. I have been lucky to have some great friends in smaller firms that I meet with regularly so that we can bounce ideas off of each other, and who also provide a sounding board for various challenges that arise when running a business. It is always nice to exchange ideas, or just to be able to talk and realize that others face similar issues. My advice would be to not be too proud to reach out to others to seek advice on improving your business – chances are others have dealt with similar issues.

How has your WOL membership been of value to you and your career?

WOL has provided me an opportunity to participate in speaking opportunities, some through WOL but others as well. I find this a great way to network and connect with others. Smaller firm life can impose time-constraints which result in neglecting opportunities to participate in speaking and writing engagements. WOL seems to have created these opportunities that I otherwise may have neglected to seek out. I also find it generally rewarding to meet, through WOL, other women who have taken the step to start their own firms.

Guilty Pleasure: What can you not live without?

Zumba and “Dancing with the Stars.” My playlist is now full of songs I can break out some Latin dance moves to!

Nominate Someone!

WOL turns the spotlight on members to highlight how they are making a difference and how they have benefited from WOL membership. It offers an opportunity for you to share your story with colleagues, inspire future entrepreneurs, and strengthen awareness of the profession and association.

Member Spotlight appears regularly on <https://www.womenownedlaw.org/>. To nominate another member email: CoachDena@gmail.com