

**Spotlight on PLDF Women Leaders**  
— **January D. Allen** —

As part of PLDF's Women's Initiative 2019, we looked west to the mile-high city, Denver, Colorado, where pioneering women have been practicing law since 1886, to interview the co-chair of PLDF's Miscellaneous PL & Cyber Claims Committee, January D. Allen. January is a Martindale-Hubbell AV Rated attorney, and served as the Colorado Defense Lawyers Association's At-Large Director during the 2017-2018 term. Her practice areas include intellectual property, construction defect, products liability, environmental claims and commercial litigation, in addition to the defense of professionals.

January has been practicing law at *Overturf McGath & Hull P.C.* for the past decade. She is an exceptionally talented partner, who provides her clients expert counsel on a wide range of legal matters. She has established herself as an accomplished defense attorney, representing professionals, corporations and government entities with first-rate skills. We asked January to share the most rewarding aspects of her current role, and comment on what she values most.

***JDA:** It is a tremendously rewarding career when you have a client who is invested in the process, and you are able to work with them toward a solution. I also value my colleagues. I have been with my firm for a total of ten years. When we spend so much time at our job, it is crucial to find the right people and partners.*

January's unique background includes an emphasis in science, with a B.S. in biology, and the law. With her exceptional education and training, and as a dedicated advocate, January provides her clients keen analysis and offers innovative solutions, making her a tremendous asset to her firm and to her clients. In reading through her bio, we wondered how she arrived in her current role, and asked her about the route she traveled.

***JDA:** My path to the law had a few twists and turns. I had been accepted at the Medical University of South Carolina after undergrad, but (with all the sense of a 21-year-old girl) I followed a boy instead. He suggested that I study law. The relationship did not ultimately work out. However, his suggestion of the law took hold as something I could do that would require analytical skill and allow me to help others. While in law school, my intellectual property professor was brilliant, passionate, and engaging. She suggested that I look into sitting for the patent bar with my science background. I never had ambitions to be a trial attorney, and was intrigued by the cross section of science and law, so I took her advice and worked toward becoming an IP transactional attorney.*

In endeavoring to initially forge a career as an IP transactional attorney, January delved into one of the fastest growing legal fields but one that continues to lack diversity and is overwhelmingly male (American Intellectual Property Law Association 2017 Report of the Economic Survey). Looking more generally at Colorado of its 26,590 active lawyers, 38% are women, but a much lower percentage are involved in construction defect work, another area of January's practice. We asked January about her entry into the state, and how she came to focus on areas of practice that often lack female practitioners.

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*JDA: I was very fortunate to have an easy entry into the Colorado market. I was hired as a summer associate by the first firm I applied with, and one month into my internship they offered me a full-time job upon graduation. My first firm did a mix of intellectual property transactional work and general litigation. For someone who does not have an engineer's mindset and enjoys the social aspect of the law, the mix of work was certainly a blessing.*

*Construction then became a focus of my practice as a by-product of the economy. When the economic downturn hit, my husband's job evaporated and so we relocated. At that time, IP firms were laying off their associates in droves. However, just before the bust there had been a huge boom in construction, and so defense firms in Colorado were inundated with construction defect defense claims. My current firm was among them, and they also happened to be handling a few intellectual property infringement matters. My experience in intellectual property gave me the edge over numerous other applicants. I grew to enjoy the construction work, with my science background enabling me to better understand the claims and interface with experts. My clients appreciate my efforts to truly understand the underlying aspects of their work, and I find it rewarding to be able to assist them in this manner.*

As she looks back upon her career thus far, we asked January if there were any mentors or role models who guided her along her path.

*JDA: There have been a number over the years. One that sticks out in my mind was from my second year in practice. I was the only female attorney in my firm. One of the attorneys from the firm upstairs was always offering encouragement and support. She was also, and still is a source of inspiration. She had the courage to leave to start her own firm in her sixth year of practice, and is now a district court judge.*

We also asked January if she believes there are decisions along the way that allowed her to rise to the leadership position she's in today, and whether she has any regrets related to career choices. What were one or two decisions you believe made the difference, and allowed you to forge a path upwards as a leader?

*JDA: Saying yes to the challenging cases. When others turned down complex litigation assignments or parachuting in for a last-minute trial, I've said yes. Pushing myself outside my comfort zone. I am by nature a bit of an introvert, who does not enjoy public speaking. To continue to grow as a person, I've signed up for board positions, speaking engagements, and teaching opportunities. I have no regrets. I have a firm that provides the flexibility for me to be a mother, and provides challenging and rewarding work.*

January's fulfilling career seemingly corresponds to other female lawyers experience as reflected in research conducted by the ABA for their **Achieving Long-Term Careers for Women in Law** initiative which examined the high rate of attrition among women lawyers practicing for more than 20 years. The study noted that both men and women have comparable satisfaction with the practice of law, before examining the reasons behind the attrition. A documentary, **Balancing the Scales**, highlighted three reasons women leave the law: work/life balance, unconscious bias and the pay

gap. We asked January to provide any insights into challenges she's had to overcome, simply due to the fact she's practicing in a field replete with male lawyers.

**JDA:** *While diversity has increased in the last decade, construction defect defense is still a male-dominated field. The sentiments about the quality or ability of the few women lawyers in depositions or mediations are often palpable. I've been called "dear," "hon," and the like more times than I care to remember. I often need to be more aggressive than I would prefer to get the time and opportunity to speak on my clients' behalf in these settings. Being a working mother has carried its own set of challenges. It takes effort to gain understanding from others who have not gone through the process—asking judges or co-counsel for pumping breaks, apologizing to attendees on conference calls for a crying baby in the background, explaining to colleagues or clients that your child's school play takes priority, etc.*

January's great, steady strength may well be not allowing challenges to get in her way. We asked January what advice she'd give to other female lawyers who are faced with similar challenges.

**JDA:** *Confidence. Despite patronizing comments or attitudes, remember that you are providing excellent legal work that has value for your client. Speak up about the disparate treatment. Sometimes the offender is oblivious to their blunder. In those circumstances, a witty retort, or humorous way of highlighting it usually corrects the issue. Other times, it is more egregious. I've found good support from my colleagues, superiors, and even judges, in those circumstances.*

By the age of 50, female practicing lawyers will be outnumbered 3 to 1, we asked January what she felt she would need in order to continue to find fulfillment and sustain her practice well into her later years.

**JDA:** *The financial need to put two kids through college is certainly a driver. That practical aspect aside, we are blessed to work in a profession that presents us with new challenges and opportunities for learning and growth every day. I intend to continue to seek out the complex cases, and find more efficient means of helping my clients. This should certainly sustain my practice until my kids have graduated college...which will indeed be "well into [my] later years."*

In closing, we asked about any advice January would give her younger self, and any recommendations she'd offer others struggling with their work-life balance.

**JDA:** *Find a workplace that will help you achieve balance, and support your goals—or create your own. Take pride in providing quality work, not being the busiest. Zealously protect the time you have with your family. At my house we have what my kids call 'no phone zone.' My five year delights in taking my phone from me every night when I get home, and putting it in the 'phone basket' where it has to stay until they are tucked in.*

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## About January D. Allen

**January D. Allen** is a Partner with *Overturf McGath & Hull, P.C.* in Denver, Colorado. Her practice focuses on the defense of professionals in complex construction, environmental, products liability, and intellectual property matters. She is a past Board member of the Colorado Defense Lawyers Association, and a current committee chair and columnist for the *Professional Liability Defense Quarterly*.

## About the PLDF

The Professional Liability Defense Federation™ is a not-for-profit organization designed to bring together attorneys, claims professionals and risk management specialists to share expertise and information helpful to the successful defense of professional liability claims.

Membership in the PLDF includes delivery of the *Professional Liability Defense Quarterly*, which is devoted to current legal defense and claims handling issues. Articles of topical interest spanning a wide range of malpractice defense subjects are presented to add value to effective defense preparations for the claims handler and defense counsel. We encourage member submission of articles proposed for publication to: Editor-in-Chief, *Professional Liability Defense Quarterly*, PO Box 588, Rochester IL 62563-0588, [sandra@PLDF.org](mailto:sandra@PLDF.org).

To learn more about the PLDF and all that we have to offer, please visit [www.PLDF.org](http://www.PLDF.org) or contact our management team: Managing Director Sandra J. Wulf, CAE, IOM, [sandra@pldf.org](mailto:sandra@pldf.org); Deputy Director Sara Decatoire, CAE, IOM, [sarad@pldf.org](mailto:sarad@pldf.org).