

KRISTEN HUDSON

Advocating for Clients, Serving the Community, Counseling Colleagues

by Dave Argentar

The Boys & Girls Club of Cabarrus County, North Carolina, offers lots of classes and programs for area youths. Kristen E. Hudson learned a great deal during the afternoons and summer days she spent there throughout high school. But the lessons that endured and have come to define the Chicago litigator did not involve improving her jump shot or refining her theater skills.

“It was a place where everyone was welcome. It didn’t matter what your race, sex, religion or socio-economic status was. Everyone was equal, we all had the same ability to participate and achieve, and we all played and worked together,” Hudson recalls. “It showed me how communities are the pillars of society, and it made a huge difference in my life in terms of the importance of community service and giving back.”

That commitment to giving back and improving her hometown of Concord earned Hudson the club’s 1993 Youth of the Year Award, an honor which is both a source of pride and the first of many accolades recognizing a life and career grounded in the centrality of service.

A principal and co-general counsel at Chuhak & Tecson, P.C., Hudson’s robust commercial litigation and policyholder-side insurance coverage practice affords her another forum in which her dedication to serving others, as well as her fearless advocacy, is brought to the fore.

CONFIDENCE AND COMMITMENT

“I’ve worked with a lot of litigators,” says Matthew Matigian, one of Hudson’s clients, “and from my very first meeting with Kristen, she blew away my already unreasonably high expectations.

“Kristen came into a complex matter knowing as much about us and the facts of our case as if she’d been involved for years. Her understanding of the issues and challenges we faced was extraordinary, matched only by the way she took that due diligence and developed a clear plan of attack which ultimately produced an outstanding result.”

Matigian also notes with a bit of awe



Hudson’s combination of courtroom confidence and client consideration.

“Kristen had the same confidence, energy and force whether the wind was at her back or in her face,” Matigian says. “She’s quick on her feet, intelligent, tough and simply will not be intimidated.

“At the same time, she is someone who, despite no doubt recognizing us as ‘high maintenance’ clients, was always available and responsive any day of the week, any time of day. Kristen always took as much time as needed to address our questions, and where other lawyers may have become irritated, she was actually appreciative of our input and engagement. I can’t tell you how impressive that is.”

CAROLINA BLUE TO CHICAGO LOOP

As a self-proclaimed “band nerd,” dancer, and basketball player in high school, Hudson may not have envisioned herself thundering away as an accomplished trial lawyer in

a Chicago courtroom, but she definitely saw herself as a passionate Tar Heel sitting courtside in Chapel Hill.

“I grew up in a Tar Heel basketball family bleeding Carolina blue just like my dad,” she says with a smile. “It was a foregone conclusion that I would go to the University of North Carolina.”

When she wasn’t watching hoops, Hudson was earning her degree in French Education, including spending a semester studying at the Sorbonne in Paris. Along with a summer semester in Japan, the experience ignited a lifelong love of travel and exploring new and different places, an inclination which ultimately brought her to Chicago years later.

Unsurprisingly, Hudson also continued her efforts to give back and serve others while in college, taking leadership roles with the campus YMCA on community outreach projects and working as a counselor at Camp Spencer, the Boys & Girls Club camp where she spent formative summers as a kid.

“I had a lot of wonderful and diverse mentors and role models at home, at the club, and elsewhere,” she recalls. “All of those people played a big part in shaping me, and I thought it was important while I was in college to try and do the same by reaching back and helping the people coming up behind me. That’s a feeling that’s never really left.”

Although she took the LSAT and considered a career in law as an undergrad, Hudson’s predisposition for mentoring and teaching contributed to her taking a yearlong stint as a public school French and drama teacher. She enjoyed the experience, but she didn’t see it as the career she wanted to pursue. After working in a corporate environment in Charlotte and coming to a similar conclusion, Hudson returned to her interest in the law and accepted several academic scholarships to attend The John Marshall Law School tuition-free.

“At that time, Chicago was just a place on a map that I had not yet been,” she says.

Looking out the window to see snow falling on the same day as the Chicago Cubs home opener, she recalls being shocked by the weather. Otherwise, she quickly fell in love with the city she still calls home.

“All of the nonstop flights to places throughout the world was a bonus as well,” the travel-loving Hudson jokes.

At John Marshall, Hudson served as editor-in-chief of the law review and graduated *magna cum laude*. Of her many accomplishments and experiences in law school, perhaps none was more impactful than her participation in the Vis International Commercial Arbitration Moot competition in Vienna, Austria. The prestigious and intense competition pitted Hudson’s and her teammates’ advocacy and research skills against law students from around the globe. They faced off on complex questions of international commercial law.

“It was the best thing I did in law school,” she says unequivocally. “It was transformative in terms of how I came to approach the practice of commercial law. There is no better way to train to represent clients than on an international stage against the best in the world. It was like the Olympics of law school.”

IRON FIST, VELVET GLOVE

Hudson began her career as a commercial litigator, eventually adding insurance coverage work to her practice. The combination of the two suits Hudson, as she enjoys navigating the complex contractual issues involved in representing policyholders in their claims against insurers while also relishing the strategic challenges and courtroom advocacy more prominent in her commercial practice.

Hudson’s acumen as an advocate has made a big impression on her fellow litigators.

“She is the proverbial iron fist beneath the velvet glove,” says Al Dolinko, Hudson’s co-counsel for several years on a complicated family business dispute. “She won’t be pushed around by anyone, and if someone tries to play games or sneak something past her, she will catch them and call them out.”

“**Kristen is a true counselor, not just a voice on the other end of the phone reporting on what happened in court today.**”

Dolinko adds that it is not just her courtroom prowess that makes Hudson a tremendous asset for her clients, it is her appreciation of the broader business considerations and personal relationships which play critical roles in commercial litigation.

“Kristen is a true counselor, not just a voice on the other end of the phone reporting on what happened in court today,” Dolinko says. “She’s the kind of lawyer every business person

wants to hire, sensitive to costs and acutely aware of litigation’s impact on reputation, disruption to operations and other issues beyond the four corners of the lawsuit.”

HOME FOR HER PRACTICE, PRIORITIES

Hudson spent a dozen years at various Chicago law firms building her skills, practice and reputation as a talented litigator before joining Chuhak & Tecson in June 2015. The lawyer Hudson had become—committed in equal measure to her clients, her community and her colleagues—found a home at a firm providing new opportunities and a matching philosophy about client service and community responsibility.

“I was looking to move from a litigation boutique to a mid-size firm with multiple practice groups that would expand the nature and scope of my practice,” Hudson says. “At Chuhak & Tecson, I have a varied caseload that provides many opportunities for advocacy at different levels and in different forums. There isn’t a one-size-fits-all approach to the kind of work I do here, and I love the process of crafting strategies unique to whatever matter I’m working on.”

Steve Wood, Chuhak & Tecson principal and chair of the firm’s litigation practice



After coaching John Marshall’s International Moot Arbitration team in a Hong Kong competition, Hudson visited the Mutianyu Great Wall 70 kilometers outside central Beijing.

group, has the opportunity to watch Hudson implement those strategies on behalf of the firm's clients every day.

"It was a great day for the firm and our clients when Kristen decided to join us," Wood says. "Kristen quickly established herself as one of the most reliable and in-demand litigation principals in the firm. She's very smart, the quality of her work is uniformly outstanding, she's very agile on her feet and is an absolute pleasure to work with."

As Chuhak & Tecson's co-general counsel, Hudson counts the firm as one of her clients, a position which Wood says fits both her insurance coverage background as well as her sound judgment.

"We all sleep better at night knowing Kristen has our backs," Wood says.

At Chuhak & Tecson, Hudson also found an environment that valued community service and equal opportunity as much as she did.

"The firm is really dedicated to diversity and inclusion in the workplace and to giving back to our communities," says Hudson, who chairs Chuhak & Tecson's Diversity and Inclusion Council. "This make us all better lawyers. I firmly believe that diverse perspectives and working with others from different communities and backgrounds help us build empathy and craft more effective solutions to problems both in our work and in our neighborhoods."

WON'T LET UP LIFTING OTHERS UP

For over 15 years, Hudson has committed countless hours to Chicago Volunteer Legal Services (CVLS) to ensure that low-income Chicagoans can receive quality legal representation. Having begun her association there as a graduate fellow with the Public Interest Law Initiative, she served as president and will soon conclude eight years on the CVLS board of directors while still actively handling matters for the organization's clients.

"I see pro bono work as every lawyer's responsibility," Hudson says. "There are a lot of good people trying to do the right thing in their communities, but they need the kind of assistance only lawyers can provide."

Her role as a teacher and mentor manifests itself today in advancing women in the practice and business of law. She works with younger lawyers to help them grow and assume leadership positions in the profession.

In 2016, Hudson was honored with the CBA Alliance for Women Alta May Hulett Award. The award acknowledges an outstanding woman lawyer who has significantly contributed to the advancement of women in the legal profession or other areas, and whose career exemplifies the highest level of professional achievement, ethics



Hudson, a space enthusiast and Adler Planetarium member, poses there with Storm Troopers.



Hudson at Yellowstone National Park's Old Faithful after her wedding in Montana

and excellence.

Hudson's commitment to helping others directly led to a different kind of commitment. She met her husband, Sean, while the two were training for a triathlon to raise money for leukemia research. The Wicker Park residents share a love of travel and cooking, as well as a deep fondness for Phoenix, their shepherd-mix rescue dog.

This past spring, the common threads of Hudson's life—mentoring and teaching, powerful advocacy, and the adventure of travel—all came together in Hong Kong. She returned to the international arbitration competition that made such an impact on her in law school, this time as one of the coaches of the John Marshall team.

Hudson's co-coach and fellow attorney, Daniel Saeedi, says Hudson's tireless work preparing the team for battle focused just

as much on the students' development as lawyers and people as it did on the nuances of international commercial law.

"Kristen is a natural teacher and has a passion and gift for helping others understand complex subjects," Saeedi says. "But it goes beyond that. Kristen would stress and teach the team life skills and attorney skills in terms of how to practice effectively and professionally. They came into the competition as students, but they emerged as lawyers."

Saeedi also is effusive in his praise of Hudson's penchant for thorough preparation, meticulous research and flawless execution, all of which served the John Marshall team well during their efforts in Asia.

"Even though Kristen had never been there in her life, she found us all the best restaurants in Hong Kong," Saeedi jokes. "We ate a lot of really good dim sum because of her." ■