



Top Women Lawyers 2021

Jessica Scott

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JESSICA FOLKER | LAW WEEK COLORADO

Jessica Scott credits her interest in the law to the “Trial of the Century.” During her early teen years, the Wheeler Trigg O’Donnell partner lived just outside Los Angeles, during the O.J. Simpson trial. She tuned in to the televised trial whenever she had a chance.

“I was enthralled with all of it,” Scott said. “Learning about what reasonable doubt means and all these different procedural aspects where you would see the lawyers arguing about what actually gets shown to the jury — all that was so interesting to me.” From that point on, Scott knew she was going to be an attorney. “I never really considered anything else after that,” she said.

When she started law school at the University of California – Berkeley, she planned to become a criminal defense lawyer. But she later realized it would be a long road to handling high-stakes cases, and defending people charged with DUIs or breaking and entering didn’t sound appealing. The prospect of doing civil litigation — and paying off some law school loans in the process — sounded appealing, and her interest in civil law grew during a clerkship at the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals.

“I came to the realization ... that in criminal law, you may have different facts that are going to be interesting from case to case, but in terms of the law, it’s pretty much set,” Scott said. “That’s not the case with civil law. And so there’s constantly new opportunities to learn and new opportunities to develop.”

Those opportunities came swiftly at Wheeler Trigg O’Donnell, where Scott has worked for nearly 16 years. She arrived at the firm — and Denver — right after her clerkship and started working on mass and class action lawsuits. After about five years at the firm, a partner asked Scott to stay up to speed on a client who was involved in multi-district litigation in a court in another state but expected to have a case kicked back to Colorado. Normally, one of the firm’s partners would have been more involved, Scott said, but at the time, everyone at the firm was “fully subscribed” with hundreds of arbitrations for another client. “I took a much more direct face-to-face role with the client and in developing their trust,” she said. “And they started giving us more and more work.”

As Scott’s relationship with the client grew, the work took her around the country — from Montana to California to Washington, D.C. — for depositions, arbitrations and trial preparation. She said the company’s in-house attorneys value skills over seniority, which has played a part in the opportunities and responsibilities she was able to take on early in her career.

“Who’s going to give you your best argument? Who can explain it? Who can articulate it? Who’s going to know the cases inside and out?” she said. “That mattered more to them than, ‘OK, who’s got the gray hair?’”

Scott is now lead counsel for the client in a nationwide Federal Labor Standards Act collective action. Her team was also named national coordinating counsel for the litigation, which has brought even more work and responsibility, and she’ll soon be arguing in a class certification hearing.

She has assembled a team of about 15 attorneys and staff to help with the growing volume of work. “I love that I’ve been able to incorporate more partners at the firm and more associates at the firm in working on these things,” Scott said. “I like to help associates with development, and this gives me an opportunity to do that.”

“I’m working a lot, but it doesn’t feel like it,” said Scott. Her responsibilities outside of work have also grown in recent years. She and her husband have two young children who just finished kindergarten and first grade. During the pandemic, the family added three puppies to the household. They originally intended to adopt just two of three shelter dogs that arrived from Oklahoma, but when another prospective owner backed out, they agreed to take the entire litter.

Scott said she’s a “big proponent” of the “adopt, don’t shop” movement, and she volunteers for animal shelters such as MaxFund and the Denver Dumb Friends League. For several years, she helped coordinate WTO’s participation in the Furry Scurry, an annual fundraiser walk for DDFL. In previous years she had to borrow a dog for the event, but those days are over.

“If anything, I have some to spare,” she said.

One of the lessons Scott has taken from her career, and especially during the pandemic, is the importance of adding a bit of fun to her work. “Obviously, our jobs are very intense, and we need to take what we do very seriously,” she said, but “to enjoy what we’re doing in the law, we need to try and not take ourselves too seriously.”

Scott keeps a Nerf gun and a cutout of Dinger, the Colorado Rockies dinosaur mascot, in her office. She has also “picked up a fun sneaker habit” and sometimes wears a blazer with a Wonder Woman lining to client meetings.

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