

SUZANNE L. JONES AND ELLEN A. BRINKMAN

Fostering a Culture of Inclusion From Coast to Coast

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For those who may not have heard — there's a new law firm in town. In 2019, Gordon Rees Scully Mansukhani, LLP established its Minneapolis office, and in April 2022, the firm celebrated its three-year anniversary as the first and only law firm in the nation with offices in all 50 states. An AmLaw 100 firm with more than 1,000 attorneys strategically placed in 74 offices across the U.S., Gordon & Rees is powerfully positioned to deliver unparalleled legal service nationwide. The

Law360 Glass Ceiling Report lists Gordon & Rees among the top 15 firms for female attorneys, and the *American Lawyer Diversity Scorecard* lists it as one of the top 25 firms for diverse attorneys, opening up exciting opportunities for lawyers who are seeking advancement in a diverse practice environment.

Suzanne L. Jones is a partner in the firm's Minneapolis office. She represents insurance companies across the country in complex first and third-party declaratory judgment

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actions, breach of contract actions, rescission actions, direct actions and extra-contractual and bad faith actions. Her practice also includes defending insurance agents and brokers, real estate agents, and attorneys against professional liability claims, as well as handling commercial and contract disputes. She handles appeals in both state and federal courts.

Engaged by a former colleague who had joined Gordon & Rees, Jones joined the firm in March 2020, just before the pandemic brought much of the world to a standstill. She came from national firm Hinshaw and Culbertson, where she had been practicing for 12 years, piqued by Gordon & Rees' 50-state platform and record of employee retention.

"It was not an ideal time to move," she says, "but none of us knew that then. I was the only one in Minnesota, physically, and the pandemic presented challenges for growing a new office. But things are moving and shaking again. Since this spring, we've grown to nine attorneys in the Minneapolis office, and are still looking to hire more. I'm excited about the progress we've made and the growth that will continue to happen. The work never stopped — there was never even a lull. In fact, the past two years were some of my busiest ever. I'm so grateful to be here."

Ellen A. Brinkman, also a partner in the Minneapolis office, represents a variety of clients from small businesses to Fortune 500 companies in matters spanning employment, shareholder and education-related claims in the courtroom and in agency settings. She also represents employers seeking to enforce non-competition agreements and other post-employment restrictive covenants, and defends against claims involving restrictive covenants. Brinkman has litigated hundreds of cases in state and federal court.

Following a successful 14-year career at notable Minneapolis firm Briggs and Morgan, Brinkman was patiently recruited by Gordon & Rees. She finally joined the firm in June 2022.

"They approached me again this year to let me know the firm is growing. I had not met Suzanne at the time, but they spoke very highly of her, and we have mutual friends who also spoke so highly of her. The platform of 50 states, plus building an office and acting as co-managing partners with Suzanne was an opportunity unlike any other. It's been a whirlwind in an extremely positive way, and I am so impressed with the firm."

According to a *Glass Ceiling Report* by Law360, only about 23% of equity partners in U.S. law firms are women. Gordon & Rees is defying the odds.

"The number of female office managing partners across the country is more than 30," Jones says. "That means that over 50% of states have a female manager in place. Diversity

is front and center here, and we want women running these offices. It reflects Gordon & Rees' values that myself and Ellen are co-managing partners, and I am Asian. What matters in terms of DEI is action, not just words on a firm website. Being in our position, it is so critically important to both of us that we have a diverse team here in Minnesota. When we look at what our office will be and who will be a part of it, diversity spans a lot of things. We want people from different educational backgrounds and every walk of life. The varying experience makes people unique and brings value to our practice."

Another area where the firm excels is its staggering 80% lateral retention rate. Jones continues, "From new associates to lateral partners with books of business, the common baseline that runs through them all is having solid foundational skills and being a motivated self-starter. But what we spend the most time on in an interview is getting to know the candidate and who they are as a person, because we want to enjoy working together. We've built such a good group of people to act as the foundation for the Minnesota office. It's critical for us to continue bringing in quality people who value client service, diversity and treating others with respect. Further, we understand that flexibility is one of the biggest assets we can offer as a firm, and with flexibility, we get a more diverse workforce."

"Gordon & Rees is fantastic about transitioning books of business," Brinkman says. "I moved a significant book with me, and the firm has done it with so many partners and teams. In some cases, the firm brings in groups of 10 to 20 lawyers at a time. Then, there are the training opportunities for newer attorneys. Associates get hands-on experience, access to the courtroom and significant interactions with clients. We need people to take on responsibilities, and we will mentor them on how to do that. I'm impressed so far with our group in Minnesota, which is a huge credit to Suzanne's leadership. We're really bucking the trends of other big law firms, with an innovative, forward-thinking approach to many things, including DEI. I am excited about the amount of interest we're getting and see a future where we're going to be busy, have fun and build a great team."

Gordon & Rees' Minneapolis office will soon be moving into new office space on the 38th floor of the IDS Center.



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