



Trademarks

From paralegal to partner: IP veteran reflects on 40-year career

Sanjana Mishra December 15 2025



Nancy Frandsen looks back on her career, from answering a paralegal advert to expanding RCCB's 'entrepreneurial' IP practice as a partner

Nancy Frandsen, senior counsel at **Royer Cooper Cohen Braunfeld**, has had a distinguished career.

Next year, she will mark 40 years as a practising attorney. However, her career in fact goes back to 1979, when she answered an advert placed by an intellectual property boutique.

Frandsen sat down with Managing IP to share her journey, from battling breast cancer to mentoring young women and finding her passion in IP.

Answering an advert

Frandsen's career started unconventionally.

In 1979, she answered an advert to be a litigation paralegal at the IP boutique Seidel Gonda Lavorgna & Monaco. She didn't know much about the IP industry, but decided to answer anyway, leading to her eventually earning the role.

She notes that in the 80s to the late 90s, the majority of IP work was done at boutiques, with these smaller practices handling large IP cases.

Frandsen says that participating in IP cases made her fall in love with the work, prompting her to attend law school so she could practice trademark law.

"It's hard to be a history major and get into an IP firm unless you come in through litigation, which is where I started. I learned quickly that I knew more than many of the lawyers coming out of law school, so being a paralegal was not going to be an acceptable spot for long."

After law school, Frandsen continued to develop her trademark litigation practice across several firms.

She notes that her moves were often shaped by a wider industry trend in which so-called 'big law' firms absorbed IP boutiques, pulling her into larger practices.

"Even though I've been at five law firms, I've only moved my practice twice. I kind of stumbled into IP, but it turned out to be a practice that I love."

She adds: "It's fun to get to know clients and learn what they're trying to do. To be the best trademark counsellor, you have to help clients figure out the best way to brand themselves."

Looking back, Frandsen notes that she has experienced all phases of trademark practice, from the era before online search tools to the present, where she grapples with the complexities of artificial intelligence.

Today, she is listed as a 'notable practitioner' for her trademark work by IP STARS, Managing IP's accreditation title.

Gender stereotypes

As Frandsen progressed from paralegal to partner, she says the lack of women at her first boutique firm was stark.

“When I was at my IP boutique, I was the only woman partner. Then, when we merged into the first ‘big law’ firm, I was the only woman partner in the IP group.”

She adds: “It was also hard because in the IP boutique realm, patents have always reigned supreme. As trademark lawyers, we often felt like second-class citizens.”

The lack of women in the IP field only intensified moments of isolation, especially when colleagues would occasionally make comments that reinforced gender stereotypes or undervalued her experience.

Frandsen recalls that while attending a conference, one of her mentors made a comment stating that women make good trademark lawyers because they ‘like to shop’.

She emphasises that her mentor meant no harm by the comment, but these moments reflect how women were perceived in the practice.

Frandsen says her role as a chapter founder and leader of ChIPs, a nonprofit organisation that supports women in tech, law, and policy, has become a way for her to advocate for women in the industry.

Surviving cancer

In 2021, Frandsen’s life shifted abruptly when she was diagnosed with breast cancer.

“I was at my 50th high school reunion with ten of my high school girlfriends when I got the news,” she recalls.

At the time, Frandsen was practising at Baker & Hostetler, describing the firm as “incredibly supportive”.

“I continued to work. Everybody deals with cancer differently, but my thing was, I’m not letting this horrible diagnosis, chemotherapy, losing my hair, and all those things that come with it, affect my life.”

She adds: “I sort of soldiered through it, probably at a bit of a reduced schedule at times, especially during the chemo weeks, which would totally wipe me out.”

She adds that practising trademark law gave her structure and purpose while undergoing treatment.

In the end, Frandsen beat breast cancer and now supports other women going through similar diagnoses.

‘Final chapter’

Since 2023, Frandsen has been practising trademark law at RCCB in Philadelphia. She works closely with her colleague Donna Tobin, a partner in the firm's New York office.

Frandsen labels RCCB's practice as "small but mighty", emphasising the firm's boutique-like, entrepreneurial IP practice.

Over the past ten years, the firm has gone from five lawyers to more than 80 who practice across all sectors.

Frandsen says she and Tobin will continue to expand RCCB's IP practice, noting that the firm may look into offering patent services in the future.

"We're strategically bringing in laterals that fit our entrepreneurial spirit and are more senior in their careers; people that have been at big law and are looking to do something a little bit different towards the end of their career."

Frandsen says that along with hiring laterals, the firm is keen to mentor the next generation of IP lawyers.

"The benefit of having the experience that Donna and I have is that we can share it with younger lawyers who may not get the same first-hand experience that we got when we were young lawyers, because the practice has changed. We can impart our knowledge on them."

With more than 40 years of experience, Frandsen expects this to be the last move of her career.

"I don't intend to move my practice again, so this is sort of my final chapter. But I'm having a lot of fun helping Donna build our practice."

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