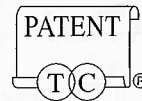


INSIGHT[®]



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This newsletter is provided with our compliments. Its purpose is to inform our readers of developments within the firm and in the legal field of intellectual property law. We invite your comments, questions, and opinions.

20 Years - An Epoch for the Patent System and for R&P

by Paul Prestia and Allan Ratner

When we formed Ratner & Prestia, merging our two solo practices in 1981, patents were disdained by many economists and many courts. The U.S. had lost its competitive edge in the international economy. Rampant inflation had driven the prime rate over 20% and law firms were satisfied if attorneys booked 1400 billable hours per year.

Oh, how times changed from 1981 to 2001. As we celebrate the twentieth anniversary of the firm, we now have three offices and over thirty attorneys and patent agents, many of whom are recognized leaders in their profession. And as we grew, intellectual property became one of the hottest areas of the law. How it all happened makes for an interesting perspective.

Whether seen as cause or effect, the Reagan era ushered in a renewed U.S. commitment to commercial and industrial innovation and leadership.

An important aspect of that devel-

opment was the rediscovery of the patent system. Designed, according to the Constitution, "to promote the progress of science and useful arts," the patent system had fallen out of favor because of the perception that it fostered monopolies. Monopolies, in any form, were anathema under the prevailing wisdom of the 60's and 70's.

This changed as businesses recognized that innovation was necessary to compete in the international marketplace, that innovation required investment, and that the best way to protect that investment

was the patent system. At the same time, Congress too saw the light. Patents had fallen in disrepute and were commonly invalidated by hostile courts, a problem exacerbated by the disparate treatment of patents in different regional courts of appeal.

To remedy this, Congress, in 1982, established a new Federal Circuit Court of Appeals to hear all patent appeals. Since then, this Court has assiduously tried to develop a more uniform and more predictable application of patent law.

(continued on page 3)

Ratner & Prestia Celebrates its 20th Anniversary

The associates of Ratner & Prestia recently surprised Paul Prestia and Allan Ratner with a luncheon in their honor as the firm celebrates its 20th anniversary year. Eighty-three employees of the firm were involved in planning the event and were charged with the momentous task



Paul and Allan are all smiles in front of over 80 employees at their surprise celebratory luncheon.

of keeping the secret from Paul and Allan for nearly two months.

Jonathan Spadt, a senior associate, developed the idea for this celebration during a brainstorming ses-

sion for 20th anniversary plans. "We wanted them to know that their incredible commitment to the development of the firm and its lawyers

(continued on page 3)

IN THIS ISSUE:

- Support Staff Training2
- Prestia Named Chair of AIPLA Fellows.....2
- R&P Announces Shareholders..3
- Speakers Forum5
- Announcing5

Support Staff Training Our Secret to Safeguarding "Human" Intellectual Property

by *Barbara A. Foley, Executive Director*

Law firms across the nation are faced with the challenge of recruiting and retaining experienced secretarial and support staff members, and the Philadelphia region is no exception. Employers are having difficulty retaining good support staff and this difficulty is not always due to the employers' failing. With the plethora of job opportunities being touted by recruiters and over the Internet, it is easy for employees to get derailed during rough times and leave for what they perceive to be a better opportunity. The time and money spent during the recruitment search and hiring process is only the beginning of a process leading to a loss of efficiency during the new employee spool-up period.

R&P recognizes the value and critical importance of informed and well-trained administrative assistants and legal support staff. We have hired wisely and are fortunate to be staffed with an abundance of talented administrative assistants. Unfortunately, talent alone is not enough - particularly in our specialized and evolving field of intellectual property law. Administrative staff not only needs to master (and hopefully exceed) specific core competencies, but they also need to stay abreast of changes in the law and how those changes may affect their daily tasks.

To empower its staff with the confidence to produce quality work product, R&P saw a need for training and education to provide a higher level of assistance to our attorneys, and ultimately to the value provided to our clients. It was clear the onus was on us to provide that training. That being said, we embarked on our journey to develop and provide to all our support staff a value-generating training program.

The firm developed, and remains committed to, a long-range development program. Formulating the actual program is only a primary task. Providing continuing education

and training to staff meant commitment from the lawyers and experienced staff members who are qualified to train. One component of our program is a support staff introductory training course in intellectual property law. This course is mandatory for all staff and covers the gamut of IP Law, from who can actually apply for a patent, to trademark protection and procedural issues relating to the firm's litigation matters. Two of our shareholders on the committee share the responsibility of teaching this course, which is offered several times a year in five, one-hour sessions. A second, advanced course is also in place that is similar in structure and opened to all support staff on a voluntary basis.

There are numerous components to R&P's support staff training program other than the two courses mentioned above. One in particular, the establishment of core competencies, is particularly noteworthy. The firm has identified core competencies that must be mastered by administrative assistants in order to provide appropriate support to R&P's attorneys. These competencies are specific to our practice area and go far beyond the employer expectations normally seen on evaluation forms. Prior to beginning our mandatory "Introductory IP Course," each new staff member is given the core competency form for review and made aware of the firm's expectations. During that staff member's first evaluation the form is used to identify deficiencies and areas where increased training may be needed. Not forgetting our advanced support staff, we have developed training and defined advanced competencies to be achieved.

As part of their first day orientation, new administrative assistants receive a one-hour informational Intellectual Property Introduction

given by a senior associate. They receive a binder of sample forms which gives them quick, easy access to a broad library of information along with a glossary of terms specifically relating to intellectual property. The training program also has a strong mentoring component which gives new support staff direct access to an experienced staff member for questions, concerns and on the spot training.

The development and implementation of our support staff program was a win/win situation. The staff, the attorneys and the firm and its clients are all beneficiaries of this program. ■

Paul F. Prestia Named Chair of AIPLA Fellows

Paul Prestia has been appointed Chair of The Fellows of the American Intellectual Property Law Association. The AIPLA Fellows was established to assist the Association with scholarly, educational research, and informational projects. At the time it was established, Paul was one of twenty senior Association members named as Charter Fellows. Criteria for selection as a Fellow of the AIPLA include prominence within the intellectual property profession, learned contributions to the profession and observance of the highest standards of ethical conduct. The American Intellectual Property Law Association is a national organization of intellectual property lawyers with over twelve thousand members. ■

