

Sterne, Kessler, Goldstein & Fox P.L.L.C.

2018 VAULT PROFILE HIGHLIGHTS



TOP 150 UNDER 150

- #5 BEST MIDSIZE LAW FIRM FOR DIVERSITY
- #5 BEST INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY BOUTIQUE



THE SCOOP

Founded in 1978 by Robert Greene Sterne and Ronald Snider as Snider & Sterne, now, Sterne Kessler Goldstein & Fox has grown through the ensuing four decades to become one of the leading IP boutiques in the nation, with a focus on the protection, transfer, and enforcement of intellectual property rights. The Washington, DC-based firm employs approximately 130 attorneys and represents clients like Google, Adidas, Apple, Bristol-Myers Squibb, AbbVie, Biogen, Broadcom, Veeam Software, and the University of Maryland.

PTAB Kings

Sterne Kessler has been leading the way in a relatively new area of IP law, cases before the Patent Trial and Appeal Board (PTAB), which was created in 2012 as part of the America Invents Act (AIA). The new administrative law body handles challenges to patent validity, as well as appeals of patent examiner rejections. The PTAB has significantly cut the amount of patent litigation heard by federal courts because the proceedings are quicker and less expensive than full-blown district court trials. Sterne Kessler has developed one of the largest PTAB practices, litigating more cases to decisions from the PTAB than any other firm and earning Managing Intellectual Property magazine's recognition as the "Firm of the Year" in its inaugural PTAB rankings in 2015. The firm's success in this newly established arena is particularly important because the new proceedings have disrupted the patent litigation landscape over the past few years and resulted in the downsizing of many other IP firms and practices in that time.

GETTING HIRED

Vault's Verdict: Because Sterne Kessler is an IP boutique, the firm is focused on candidates with technical backgrounds or advanced degrees—or both. In addition to past experience, a fit within the firm is important in this single office firm.

OUR SURVEY SAYS

Vault's Verdict: Associates call the firm a true meritocracy—they are treated with respect and challenged from the get-go. With a collegial culture, focus on training and mentoring, and flexible work arrangements, life is good for Sterne Kessler associates, though the firm's unique compensation structure still receives mixed reviews.

FIRM INFO

CONTACT INFO

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www.skf.com

PRACTICE AREAS

Business Methods • Design Patents
• Due Diligence • Hatch Waxman:
Generic & Proprietary • Interferences
• ITC Section 337 • Investigations
• Licensing • Litigation & Appeals •
Patent Office Litigation (PTAB) • Pat-
ent Prosecution • Strategic IP Advice
• Trade Secret/Unfair Competition
• Trademark, Advertising, and Anti-
Counterfeiting

THE STATS

No. of attorneys: 130

No. of offices: 1

Managing Partner: Michael B. Ray

Recruiting Chair: Paul A. Ainsworth

BASE SALARY (2017)

1st year: \$180,000

After the first year, salaries are meri-
tocratic, not lock-step, though gener-
ally follow the "Cravath scale."

Summer associate (2L): \$3,400/week

Summer associate (1L): \$3,100/week

EMPLOYMENT CONTACT

Kerrie O'Brien
Manager of Talent Acquisition
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Satisfaction

- “SKGF provides me with the opportunity to perform interesting work, allows me to work on high impact matters, has good training opportunities, and a friendly and cooperative work environment.”
- “The firm has a wide variety of clients across different technologies. The breadth of work is therefore varied and is always interesting. The partners also appear genuinely interested in transparency with regard to how the firm is doing and in the associates’ well-being. I feel that, if I were ever to become dissatisfied with some aspect of the firm, there are mechanisms in place that would allow me to voice my concerns/opinion in a way that would be heard.”
- “I love my job. I have great mentors, I work on interesting cases, I stay busy, but not over-loaded and I’m paid fairly.”

Firm Culture

- “The firm culture is very friendly. People are serious about their work, but they’re also social. The firm has social events at least once per month. Furthermore, the firm provides dinner twice per week. There are also weekly training events to get updates on the law that are open to everyone.”
- “The firm is interested in maintaining a professional and engaging but yet ‘anti-BigLaw’ atmosphere. I mean this as a compliment. There are various social activities throughout the year that are well-attended.”
- “Collegial, social, inclusive. The firm does a great job hosting events that people actually want to attend, and actually have fun attending together—definitely a contrast to prior firms I’ve worked for.”

Associate/Partner Relations

- “Directors treat the associates with a lot of respect. Even when they assign us work, they still ask us if we can take on the work, instead of just thrusting the work on us indiscriminately. The firm is transparent in terms of the objectives they use to rate our performance. They provide a quarterly firm-wide update where they give us the state of the firm. They do not, however, tell us how much everyone makes, associates’ billing rates, and the performance level of the other associates. We have semiannual performance reviews.”
- “Partners are generally very approachable and nice. All of the partners, from junior partners to our named partners, expect us to call them by their first name. Most partners are very willing to provide feedback about work quality, timing, etc.”
- “The firm is very transparent. We have at least quarterly meetings where we discuss the direction of the firm as well as finances and clients. Partner/associate relations are also good. I have no hesitation discussing work with a partner and they are very fair with feedback. The atmosphere feels very team-oriented in trying to achieve what is best for the client.”

Hours

- “Face time is not artificially required. It helps at the beginning so that people who have work (clients, directors, senior associates) to give to you know that you are available to take it. Work may not

always be evenly distributed if clients insist on only working with people that they know, but that can be helped in some cases by getting recommendations from the firm directors.”

- “The firm is very open to flexible and reduced-hours work arrangements, which is incredibly beneficial and the reason that I chose to come here.”

Compensation

- “I feel that we are compensated adequately for our work. I feel like we are competitive with other firms, although we are not at the very top of the pay scale.”
- “I think I get paid very well for what I do. The firm is upfront and fair about its objective bonuses.”

Quality of Work

- “I get a variety of different work assignments, which I enjoy. Also, the work assignments tend to vary significantly in importance, amount of time needed, and difficulty level.”
- “I mostly do substantive legal work (probably about 98% of the time). The other time is left to writing articles or doing research for prospective clients. As a first-year I do a lot of legal research, draft memos, draft early versions of briefs and motions, oversee document production, draft responses to discovery requests, and draft deficiency letters to responses to discovery requests.”

Training & Mentoring

- “We have a two week-long orientation training when we start work at the firm. Then we have ongoing training sessions that attorneys are invited to attend depending on their individual needs on a topic/subject. We also have a mentoring program, through which we have monthly lunches/dinners to talk about our professional growth. We also have ‘Buddies’ who are junior associates. We can go to them for questions.”
- “One of the best benefits at SKGF is the firm’s strong commitment to training and mentoring opportunities. There are regular and comprehensive training classes and opportunities to participate in mentoring programs.”

Pro Bono Commitment

- “The firm actively pushes attorneys to take part in pro bono work. There is a pro bono committee that brings in new work and gives attorneys opportunities to help the community.”

Diversity Efforts

- “As a gay male, I value organizations that not only value diversity, but make diversity such a priority that it becomes part of ‘who’ the organization is. Sterne Kessler is such an organization. Diversity is key to Sterne Kessler’s success, and its partners understand that.”
- “The ranks of directors are more diverse than you might expect at an IP firm of this size; maybe not so much for associates. Overall, it also depends on how numbers break down within organizations of the firm, such as practice groups divided by technology: very few women work in electronics, but many work in pharma/biotech.”