

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

2017 VAULT PROFILE HIGHLIGHTS



TOP 150 UNDER 150

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



THE SCOOP

Founded in 1978 by Robert Greene Sterne, 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.

Sterne Kessler has had its hands in some of the most important IP cases of the last few decades, helping to shape the way patents are granted and protected.

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. Sterne Kessler has developed one of the largest PTAB practices, litigating more cases to decisions from the PTAB than any other firm. The firm's success in this newly established arena is particularly important because the new proceedings has disrupted the patent litigation practice in over the past few years and resulted in the downsizing of many other IP firms and practices in that time.

FIRM INFO

CONTACT

1100 New York Ave. NW
Suite 600
Washington, DC 20005
(202) 371-2600
www.skgf.com

BASE SALARY (2016)

1st year: \$180,000
Summer associate (2L): \$3,100/week
Summer associate (1L): \$2,900/week

EMPLOYMENT CONTACT

Kerrie O'Brien
Manager of Talent Acquisition
(202) 772-8561
kobrien@skgf.com

GETTING HIRED

Vault's Verdict: As an IP boutique, Sterne Kessler looks for those with a technical background and with relevant legal experience, rather than focusing on law school ranking.

OUR SURVEY SAYS

ASSOCIATE LIFE

Satisfaction

- "Working at SKGF is great. It is intense and challenging but very rewarding."
- "I enjoy the subject matter of the work and the people I work with (including clients)."
- "This is a great place to work, especially if you come from a technical background."
- "I am satisfied with all aspects of my job including work environment, diversity of work, and work/life balance."

Firm Culture

- "Our staff organizes a variety functions for socializing (happy hours, baseball games, etc). Sometimes they are in-house (happy hour in firm's reception area) and sometimes they are outside the firm (at a restaurant, ballpark, etc)."
- "SKGF has a communal and collegial culture. Teamwork is encouraged and prevalent. Our barista bar and break room provides the opportunity to get coffee with colleagues or enjoy a quick game of Ping-Pong, skee-ball, or shuffle board."



Associate/Partner Relations

- “Associates are treated well at the firm. The firm is reasonably transparent and provides frequent communication about how we are doing.”
- “All of the partners I have worked with are respectful and interested in helping me grow as an attorney. At least twice a year, we have a firm-wide partner/associate meeting where firm finances, performance, and goals are communicated. Performance reviews are candid and focused on helping attorneys improve their practice and develop skills for achieving success.”
- “For the most part the directors are very respectful of the associates.”

Hours

- “There is plenty of work available and while I am very busy, I do not feel overworked. More importantly, hard work is noticed and recognized. There is no pressure to maintain certain office hours—it is more important that your work is well done and timely.”
- “Face time is not required, but recommended. That said, more senior associates are given a lot of flexibility in their schedules and can choose to work remotely as necessary.”

Compensation

- “The firm is very competitive as compared to similar firms in the area. Our bonus system is different than other firms, but it is very clear.”

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Work Assignments

- “I work almost entirely on substantive work for a variety of clients. I am trusted to provide substantive legal analysis and my assignments are at an appropriate level for my experience and I am allowed to take on more responsibility if I think I can handle it.”
- “Input and ideas are considered on their merits, regardless of who they come from, which allows substantive contribution from all team members.”
- “I’m largely engaged in substantive legal work. It’s appropriate for my level and experience. I prepare registrability and enforcement opinions for trademark matters; I prepare response to Office Actions, appeal briefs, and applications for patent applications; I prepare strategies for protecting the design of an article, and for protecting marks.”

Training & Mentoring

- “This firm provides excellent training and mentoring. There are required classes, lectures, and discussions. They use a very effective mentoring program as well that continues for the entire time you are an associate.”

- “The firm does a great job at providing resources for associates to develop their skills, be it formal training or informal training. The people here are friendly and good at their jobs.”
- “Excellent all around—mainly ‘on the job’ or through non-billable work.”
- “We are constantly offered in-house training—legal writing, deposition skills, case law discussions, etc. We have weekly topic-specific round tables and I am constantly pushed by directors to step out of my comfort zone.”

Career Outlook

- “Directorship appears attainable. Several exit opportunities given the technical expertise and skills gathered at the firm.”
- “Partnership is very realistic and discussed during annual reviews.”
- “I feel that I am advancing in the firm and the outlook is positive.”

SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

Pro Bono Commitment

- “Our firm has a strong pro-bono practice group. I have recently worked on patent landscape analyses for various diagnostic tools for use in developing countries.”
- “We have a strong pro bono practice and it is growing.”
- “SKGF recently awarded most innovative pro bono firm of the year by FT (re “Innovation in a Social Responsibility Project.”). Firm’s Pro Bono IP practice, focused (among other things) on protecting the IP rights of indigenous populations, was successfully shortlisted and won 2015’s Financial Times ‘Innovative Lawyers Awards in North America.’”

Diversity Efforts

- “The firm is very diverse, including at the director level.”
- “We have a women’s affinity group. Women are actively promoted and empowered.”
- “We have a diversity committee and the firm offers many opportunities to interact.”

OVERALL BUSINESS OUTLOOK

Outlook

- “Growing at a rapid pace. Very exciting times. Employee morale seems strong, but depends usually on how busy departments are. Morale dependent on practice area.”
- “Firm is doing well and headed in the right direction.”
- “From what I know, we have more work than people.”
- “Our practice group feels very busy and we have great leaders that our ensuring that interesting and challenging work continues to come in.”