

Rising Star: Kramer Levin's Hannah Lee

By Britain Eakin

Law360 (June 3, 2021, 3:35 PM EDT) -- Hannah Lee of Kramer Levin Naftalis & Frankel LLP has litigated high-stakes and high-dollar intellectual property disputes for clients in the technology and life sciences sectors, including a case that netted one of the largest damages awards in history, earning her a spot among the intellectual property attorneys under age 40 honored by Law360 Rising Stars.

THE BIGGEST CASE OF HER CAREER:

Lee described her work as part of a team that secured a \$1.9 billion award for startup Centripetal Networks Inc. in October in an infringement suit against Cisco Systems Inc. as challenging but fun. That's in part because the team had to shift gears, converting what was supposed to be a jury trial into a virtual bench trial over Zoom amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

It was the first federal trial to go virtual, and that meant there was a lot to figure out. Protocols and logistics had to be adjusted, and equipment had to be set up to minimize any technical issues during the course of the six-week trial. They also had to figure out how to prepare for examining witnesses over video.

"That was challenging but also exciting to adapt from an in-person trial to the first federal virtual bench trial," Lee said.

In the case, a Virginia federal judge found that Cisco's routers, firewalls and network switches infringed four of five patents at issue, and that Cisco had not proven any of those patents were invalid. The judge awarded Centripetal \$755.8 million in damages and multiplied that amount by 2.5 after concluding it was "an egregious case of willful misconduct."

Lee said the technology involved in the case was complicated and that it was challenging to break it down in simpler terms. "The asserted patents cover different types of cybersecurity networking technology which can be complex, but our team did a great job of



Hannah Lee
Kramer Levin

Age: 39
Home base: Menlo Park
Position: Partner
Law school: Northwestern University School of Law
First job after law school: Patent litigation associate at Perkins Coie LLP

helping the court understand the evidence, including statements from technical documents and press releases," she said.

WHY SHE'S AN IP ATTORNEY:

Lee comes from a family of scientists. She thought about pursuing a traditional academic career in chemical engineering after earning a Bachelor of Science degree from Stanford in 2003, but said she couldn't describe why that was her dream when she was filling out her grad school application.

Lee said she realized that being engaged with others and working as part of a team was likely key to her professional fulfillment, as was being able to work on important social issues. So she explored other options.

However, Lee said she didn't want to give up on working in science because she loves technology and finds it fascinating.

She sought advice from some friends who were patent examiners and others pursuing patent law, and she said she was encouraged to explore it as a career option because it was a good mix of technology and working on cutting-edge legal issues. And it wouldn't require Lee to be stuck in a chemistry lab working solo for years.

"So that's how I got into IP law," she said.

Now that she's an IP attorney, Lee said that helping clients, especially a small startup like Centripetal, is rewarding because the rewards for them can be so immense. "You realize that you can really affect people's lives and all the hard work that got them where they are," she said.

But Lee also enjoys other aspects of the job.

"Being an IP attorney allows me to learn about new types of cutting edge technologies, travel around the world to meet incredibly smart engineers and scientists, and have the opportunity to stand up in court and tell someone's story," she said.

HER PROUDEST MOMENT AS AN ATTORNEY:

Lee joked that she's most proud of having made it this far. But on a more serious note, she said assisting a seven-year-old from El Salvador who entered the U.S. unlawfully with smugglers rises to the top of her professional achievements. At the time Lee volunteered to help a colleague with the case, the child was in the middle of deportation proceedings.

She and her colleague won special juvenile immigrant status for the child, secured full custody rights for his mother and got him a green card. Lee said it was a case she'll never forget.

"Just seeing his mother cry tears of joy and relief after she obtained full custody, and after he got permanent status, was just an incredible feeling," she said. "If you can help somebody in that kind of way, it's truly, truly rewarding when it makes a difference to their lives in a very permanent way."

HOW HER PRACTICE AREA WILL CHANGE IN THE NEXT 10 YEARS:

With intellectual property law apt to change quickly, Lee said she'd be hard-pressed to predict what will happen next year, let alone in a decade. But she said she can safely say some changes from the shift to a virtual landscape amid the pandemic will likely stick around.

"We will continue to accept a more virtual way of practicing. People have realized the benefits and efficiencies of doing depositions and trials and hearings remotely, and in-person meetings won't go away, but we will become more flexible and willing to do things on video," Lee said.

Despite some initial skepticism about whether doing those things remotely would be as effective as in-person proceedings, she said it has by and large proven to work. And it's also saved people time and money.

"It's going to allow people to be more flexible in terms of when and how and where they can do litigation," Lee said. "Firms are going to try to keep up with that."

— *As told to Britain Eakin*

Law360's Rising Stars are attorneys under 40 whose legal accomplishments belie their age. A team of Law360 editors selected the 2021 Rising Stars winners after reviewing more than 1,400 submissions. Attorneys had to be under 40 as of April 30, 2021, to be eligible for this year's award. This interview has been edited and condensed.