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## Time to 'humanize the practice of law'

Hall, Prangle and Schoonveld's new leader aims to treat clients as people rather than numbers

BY JOHN FLYNN ROONEY  
Law Bulletin staff writer

Jennifer Ries-Buntain is always learning. Away from the office, she's made it a goal to learn a new sport in each decade of adulthood.

She first picked up skiing so she could accompany her now-husband on the slopes. Later, she learned tennis, which she plays with her two young sons.

"I forced myself to learn to ski in my 20s," she said. "It was so gratifying for me to learn a sport in my 30s for my children."

Her latest goal? Develop her golf game so she can play with clients.

And at the office, she always has plenty to learn in her new role as managing partner of Hall, Prangle and Schoonveld LLC.

The firm defends clients in catastrophic injury cases; handles product-liability, general commercial liability and health-care cases; and works on transportation and appellate matters.

The firm opened in 2002 with 13 lawyers. Nine of them came from the firm now known as Locke, Lord LLP.

HPS now has 48 lawyers working in seven U.S. offices, including 32 in Chicago.

Since its inception, the firm's lawyers have handled about 150 cases that led to jury verdicts.

"We have the courage to try the hard cases," Ries-Buntain said. "Our opponents know that we are willing to take cases to trial, and that is a powerful negotiating tool for settlement."

Ries-Buntain became the firm's managing partner on Aug. 1. Since early this year, she worked with Eric P. Schoonveld as co-managing partner.

For several years, the firm's

three name partners shared management responsibilities. Ries-Buntain encouraged the firm's leaders to have a single managing partner, a role Schoonveld held for the past six years.

"It's time to pass the torch to Jen," he said. "When we looked at who can take us to the next level, it's Jen."

Under Ries-Buntain's leadership, Schoonveld expects HPS to be a more cohesive team and provide a higher level of service to clients.

In her management role, Ries-Buntain wants to "humanize the practice of law."

"We need to recognize that attorneys are people, which is a good thing, because our clients are too," she said. "We need to be able to relate to and understand our clients — instead of what some firms do and think of them as just numbers or corporations."

One of her main goals is to establish efficient means of communication with her colleagues. She schedules in-person and phone meetings with the heads of the firm's other offices and lets them set the agenda so they can talk about issues of importance to them.

"I want to make sure I know

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what's going on in those offices and to be accessible to them," Ries-Buntain said.

The firm's first outside office opened in Las Vegas in 2004.

"We had a client who worked with us in Chicago and wanted to bring our quality of work to a jurisdiction in which they were having problems," Ries-Buntain said.



### Jennifer Ries-Buntain

Managing Partner,  
Hall, Prangle and Schoonveld LLC

- **Location:** Chicago
- **Revenue:** Declined to reveal 2013 figure
- **Lawyers:** 48 in seven U.S. offices
- **Age:** 42
- **Law school:** DePaul University College of Law, 1997
- **Organizations:** Member, American Board of Trial Advocates
- **Interests:** Spending time with her husband and two young sons on the ski slopes, playing tennis and hiking with the family's English sheepdog

She continues representing clients full time. She defends clients in catastrophic-injury cases, including medical-negligence and product-liability matters.

Her clients include Hospital Corporation of America, Presence Health, LifePoint Hospitals Inc. and CHE Trinity Health.

Keith A. Hebeisen, a partner at Clifford Law Offices, has opposed Ries-Buntain in a handful of medical-malpractice cases.

One of those matters was a case with multiple defendants that settled for \$4 million in 2012.

"She's very professional, does her job and gets along with people," Hebeisen said. "She represents her clients with zealous advocacy without it becoming acrimonious."

Ries-Buntain views the firm's approach as serving three disparate

groups — clients, colleagues at the firm and the community at large.

"My job as managing partner is to make sure that I am matching those three groups' strengths, skills and goals," Ries-Buntain said.

That could mean, for example, ensuring lawyers understand their clients' goals and interests.

It also involves facilitation between firm employees and the outside community — such as when five HPS lawyers and a paralegal flew to Oregon last month to participate in a relay race that started at Mount Hood. The team raised \$40,000 for clean water in Sudan.

Ries-Buntain is also part of a group of about 15 other female law firm leaders who meet for quarterly luncheons.

"It's probably the best thing I've done in terms of career development," she said. "This is an extremely bright, talented and dynamic group of women who truly believe in collaboration and who are not territorial in terms of ideas."

The group is very open to sharing ideas, she said. At one lunch, Amy B. Manning, managing partner of McGuireWoods LLP's Chicago office, mentioned a program she started at her firm that recognizes employees each week for achieving firm goals.

Ries-Buntain adopted the idea at her own firm. She sends a weekly e-mail — called "HPS Go Forward News" — in which she recognizes a firm lawyer or employee who helped move the firm's goals forward the previous week.

Born and raised in East Detroit, Mich., (now Eastpointe), she grew up the daughter of John Ries, a retired DHL truck driver, and Vicki, a school district administrator in Michigan.

After graduating from the University of Michigan and then DePaul University College of Law in 1997, she worked for a small Chicago firm for less than a year. She later joined the predecessor firm to Locke, Lord and was part of the group that formed HPS.

When her children were younger, Ries-Buntain worked four days a week under a flexible arrangement at HPS.

"I would never had made it to this position without the ability to have a flexible work position," she said. "I am grateful to my partners for their support of my flexible work arrangement."

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