

MINNESOTA EDITION | WOMEN IN LAW 2017

# ATTORNEY AT LAW

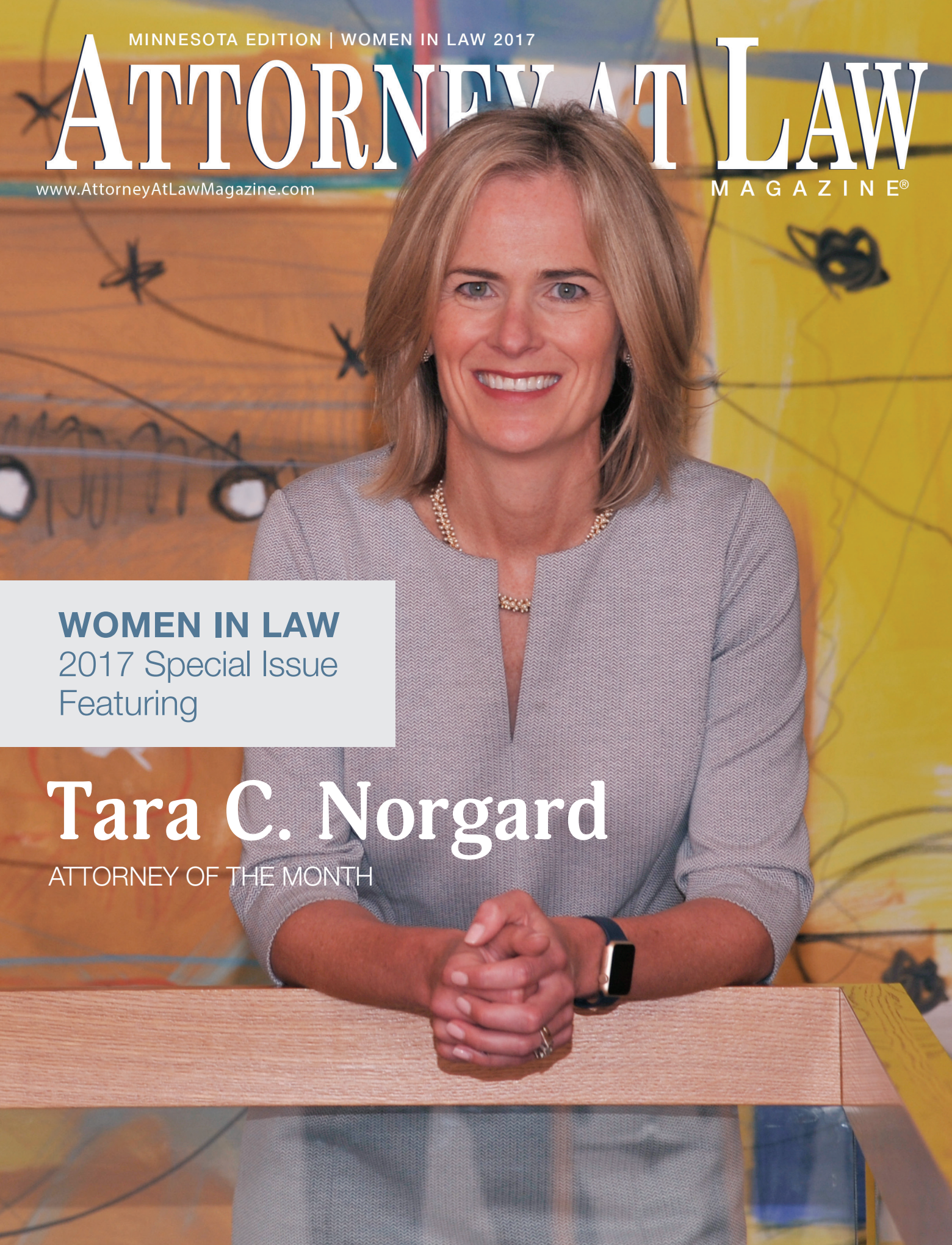
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MAGAZINE®

**WOMEN IN LAW**  
2017 Special Issue  
Featuring

# Tara C. Norgard

ATTORNEY OF THE MONTH



Attorney of the Month



Eclipse Productions

# Tara C. Norgard

Leading a Chorus of Welcome

*By Haley Freeman*



I've been fortunate to have many extraordinary mentors, both women and men, throughout my career.



**T**ara C. Norgard remembers the moment she decided to become an intellectual property litigator. She was a summer associate at Sidley & Austin in Chicago, where she found her work with the IP group both challenging and rewarding. When she accompanied a partner to a hearing in a large patent case, she entered a courtroom with a sea of men in black suits.

"There was only one woman among them," Norgard recalled. "I don't even know who she represented. But it didn't matter. She gave me a nod and a warm smile from across the room and whispered, 'Welcome.' I wish I knew who she was. I'd like to thank her.

"I knew in that moment that there was room in the IP profession for more women – and how much it mattered to be welcomed. I've been fortunate to have many extraordinary mentors, both women and men, throughout my career. But I will never forget when a woman I did not even know welcomed me as a young lawyer. It had a powerful impact that remains with me to this day."

### **Bridging the Gap**

Trained in political science, Norgard brings a unique perspective to a community of IP lawyers who are oftentimes scientists and engineers. She began her career as a key staffer for a venture capitalist and entrepreneur, and later worked for a global consulting firm. Norgard credits her early career as providing her with an essential, first-hand understanding of the business context of her client's IP matters. "Because I have a background in business, I don't see clients and cases solely through a legal lens. Every IP issue

operates in the larger setting of a business, a market, or somebody's life, in a meaningful way."

Norgard's sense of curiosity also drives her advocacy. "I was drawn to IP because I have a strong interest in technology – and an ability to explain it in ways that make sense to engineers and non-engineers alike. By bridging that gap, I am able to bring the stories of my clients' technology to life in ways that are clear and compelling in the courtroom."

She still remembers her first IP case with humor. "It involved extrusions. Think of a massive toothpaste tube, with plastic and sawdust melted together inside, then formed into everything from outdoor decking planks to picture frames. It was all I could talk about – and my husband finally felt he should bring that to my attention. As we were heading out one evening, he said, 'I'm so happy you have found a career that inspires you, but if you keep talking about this plastic and sawdust stuff, we're not going to have any friends,'" she laughed. "That moment was a great one for me. It told me I'd really found something I loved."

While Norgard's primary practice focuses on intellectual property, she continues to enhance her practice with different experiences. Over the past eight years, she has served as general counsel for two large receiverships, both with an international reach. "IP litigation and federal court receiverships are an unlikely pairing. But the wide array of legal work has made me a more skilled and agile advocate on behalf of my IP clients. Because I have experience in multiple practice areas, I am very comfortable

litigating the many issues that inevitably arise in any case."

Norgard also recently added mediation to her practice. She is a qualified neutral on the Minnesota Supreme Court's statewide roster who is able to help parties find common ground in complex commercial disputes. "Whether as an advocate or a neutral, I think it is critical to understand when a dispute can be resolved out of the courtroom – and to know how to make that happen."

### **Exceptional Lawyers; Exceptional Human Beings**

Norgard joined Carlson Caspers in 2004, after returning home to the Twin Cities from Chicago. "This firm was founded by four attorneys who were leading IP trial lawyers in the Twin Cities and nationally. Although they were seasoned litigators, the firm was only a year old when I joined. In Chicago, I cut my teeth in sophisticated patent cases litigated across the country. I wanted to continue that same caliber of practice in a city where my husband and I could raise our kids closer to family. When I was introduced to Alan Carlson and the other founding partners at Carlson Caspers, I knew I'd found the perfect fit."

Norgard expresses her abiding gratitude for the partners who have welcomed her as the firm's first woman attorney and then partner. "They have taught me so much about what it means to be a good lawyer," she said. "I am surrounded by some of the most talented lawyers and clients in the country. I can't think of a better way to go to work each day."

Today, Carlson Caspers is a firm of 30 attorneys – seven of them women.



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Standing (L-R): Jennell C. Bilek, Caroline L. Marsili, Shelleaha L. Jones, Saukshmya Trichi and Alexandra J. Olson  
Seated: Tara C. Norgard and Sarah M. Stensland

“ I am surrounded by some of the most talented lawyers and clients in the country. I can't think of a better way to go to work each day.



This community of extraordinary women includes:

**Jennell C. Bilek, J.D., Pharm.D., Ph.D.**

Bilek focuses her practice on intellectual property litigation and counseling. She recently served as trial counsel in two bench trials before the U.S. District Court for the District of Delaware.

**Shelleaha L. Jones, J.D., Pharm.D., B.A., Biology, licensed pharmacist**

Jones' emphasis is patent litigation. She draws on her public and private-sector health care experience to advise health care, medical device and pharmaceutical clients on a broad range of legal matters.

**Caroline L. Marsili, J.D., B.A., Biology**

Marsili's practice focus is patent litigation. She has experience in antitrust litigation and clearance investigations, and has worked on matters involving pharmaceuticals, medical devices and telecommunications.

**Alexandra J. Olson, J.D., B.S., Chemical Engineering**

Olson's emphasis is patent and trade secret litigation and licensing. She draws

upon her engineering background to represent clients in the pharmaceutical, medical device and agricultural industries.

**Sarah M. Stensland, Partner, J.D., B.S., Chemical Engineering**

Stensland is an intellectual property litigator. Her experience includes defending generic pharmaceutical companies in patent infringement actions, enforcing a flagship trademark on behalf of a materials manufacturer, and defending a medical device company in patent infringement actions involving heart devices.

**Saukshmya Trichi, LL.M., M.Sc., Biotechnology**

Trichi has prior experience as an intellectual property litigator in India and continues to focus on this area in her current practice. She is involved in litigation and advisory work covering various technical disciplines, such as pharmaceuticals, biotechnology and medical devices.

In addition to these talented women, Norgard has found a community of supportive colleagues and caring friends in her firm. When she and her husband, Kevin

Skow, began an adoption process, a partner connected her with Friends of FANA, a nonprofit organization that unites Colombian children with adoptive families. “Phil Caspers knew Kevin and I were exploring adoption, and he introduced me to a client who was affiliated with FANA.”

Norgard and Skow applied to FANA. A short time later, Norgard was at the St. Paul Federal Courthouse, when Derek Vandenberg tracked her down with an urgent request to return to the office. Upon her arrival she was ushered into the conference room, where her colleagues and client had convened what appeared to be a business meeting, complete with a PowerPoint. “There on the screen was a picture of our daughter, who was waiting for us in a nursery in Bogota,” Norgard warmly recalled. “I teased my partners that they never expected a baby to be delivered in the boardroom

when they formed this firm. Yet there she was.” Norgard and her husband have welcomed two children to their family through FANA with the support of her colleagues.

Norgard is leading a chorus of welcome as co-founder of the firm's committee on diversity and inclusion, which she co-chairs with attorney Jennell Bilek. The committee's mission is ensuring that people of diverse backgrounds and beliefs are involved in all levels of the firm, client relationships and the community as a whole.

“In Minnesota, we have a long history of women judges and lawyers who have forged a path that have made mine easier,” Norgard said. “I have had the benefit of so many incredible people who have taken a personal interest in supporting me every step of the way. Throughout my career, I have often been the only woman in the room, and have always felt welcomed and equal. Yet, I am keenly aware that this is not the experience of every woman or person of diverse background.” It is something she is determined to change.

Norgard's dedication to making the legal profession accessible to everyone is not limited to her firm or her practice. “Our federal courthouse is emblazoned with the words, Equal Justice Under Law. We must relentlessly bring life to those words, not only as advocates for our clients, but by welcoming and supporting each other in the profession, regardless of what our race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation or identity, and disability status may be.”

With a practice that is almost exclusively federal, Norgard has long been an energetic supporter of the Federal Bar Association. As immediate past-president of the Minnesota Chapter, she remains a member of the board of directors. In 2017, she was appointed chair of the national FBA's special committee on diversity. In this role, she hopes to bring Minnesota's strong tradition of diversity and inclusion to help lead a chorus of welcome across the nation.

“When I was in law school, I had the privilege of serving as an extern for Judge Michael J. Davis. As a mentor and a role model ever since, he taught me that being a lawyer does not begin or end with a winning brief or jury verdict. He and his colleagues on our bench, along with so many others in this district, are deeply engaged in the legal and broader community and work tirelessly to ensure that equality and

## At a Glance

### Carlson Caspers

Capella Tower, Suite 4200  
225 South Sixth Street  
Minneapolis, MN 55402  
(612) 436-9600  
[www.carlsoncaspers.com](http://www.carlsoncaspers.com)

### Education

Juris Doctor, Magna cum Laude,  
University of Minnesota Law  
School, Order of the Coif, Articles  
Editor of Minnesota Law Review  
Bachelor of Arts in Political Science,  
Magna cum Laude, Marquette  
University, Phi Beta Kappa

### Honors

Top 50: Women Minnesota Super  
Lawyers  
Top 100: Minnesota Super  
Lawyers  
Martindale-Hubbell AV Preeminent  
Peer Review Rating  
Best Lawyers in America  
Attorney of the Year, Minnesota  
Lawyer, Latino Legal Experience  
Team

### Memberships

Minnesota Chapter of the Federal  
Bar Association, Past-President  
(2016-2017) and Board Member  
(2006-Present)  
Federal Bar Association, Special  
Committee on Diversity, Chair  
American Bar Foundation, Fellow  
Litigation Counsel of America,  
Fellow

civil rights for all people are, and remain, at the forefront of our collective conscience and ongoing work. I am so grateful to those leaders and to be in a profession where I can help to ensure that all humans are treated with dignity, respect and equality.”

She concluded, “I am deeply committed to ensuring that when someone walks into my firm, the courthouse, or any other setting, I won't be the only one saying welcome – there will be a chorus of welcome.”

