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20 TO WATCH UNDER 40

Forum Focused

Keker & Van Nest partner Christa Anderson scored a big win in November when she successfully fended off a multibillion-dollar patent-infringement lawsuit against semiconductor powerhouse Intel Corp.

But it was more than the scale of the victory that made it significant.

It also was the venue: Anderson and her partner Bob Van Nest won on a summary-judgment motion in the notoriously plaintiff-friendly Eastern District of Texas.

Despite the difficult odds, they were prepared to take Intel's case to trial.

"We felt strongly that this was an invalid patent from the beginning," Anderson said. "We were going to fight until the end." Intel must have been pleased with the win: The company has hired Anderson and Van Nest to represent it in another major patent lawsuit in the Eastern District of Texas.

Anderson has spent most of her career at Keker & Van Nest, where she specializes in complex and high-stakes business litigation.

The Harvard Law School graduate started at the San Francisco litigation boutique in 1996, after two years at Mintz Levin Cohn Ferris Glovsky and Popeo in Boston.

Anderson didn't always plan to go to law school; she was a math major at Wellesley College.

"I really enjoyed it, but I was anxious to do something that was less academic and more real-world-oriented," Anderson said. A relative who was a lawyer suggested law school, so she went for it. She has never regretted her decision.

It was everything I hoped for, and a lot more," Anderson said. "I have never been bored. It's constantly a challenge." One of the reasons Anderson likes being a litigator is that she enjoys appearing in court and having the chance to debate. "I very much enjoy presenting an argument," she said. "I like a good fight."

One of Anderson's longtime hobbies is martial arts. She has done American Kenpo, kickboxing and Brazilian jujitsu over the years, and she believes that practice is connected to her love of litigating.

"It's something that dovetails with the kind



Christa Anderson, 38
Keker & Van Nest
Position: Partner
Law school: Harvard Law School
Recent big case: Successfully thwarting a patent-infringement suit against Intel Corp. in the Eastern District of Texas, known as a plaintiff-friendly venue.

Photo: Xiang Xing Zhou

of work I do in a lot of ways — enjoying the adrenaline rush of being in a competition," Anderson said. Although she still does martial arts occasionally, she has had to cut back a bit since she had children.

Anderson and her husband have three, ages 8, 6 and 4. She works full time, something that's been made easier by the firm's flexibility regarding her schedule, she said.

"You can have a happy family life and practice law," Anderson said. "It's really doable if you are creative about solutions."

When her children were very small, Anderson would get to the office around 5 a.m.

That schedule enabled her to get a "jump on the day." If she needed to work late, she could do so and still be home in time for dinner.

According to Van Nest, Anderson combines outstanding legal work with a great ability to organize cases and make good, tactical judgments.

"Clients love working with Christa because of that," Van Nest said. "She has really got the judgment and ability of somebody who is a lot older."

For example, Anderson always exercises good judgement about what to do — and not do — when handling cases in out-of-town courts where local customs are a factor, he said.

"That's not one-size-fits-all; it's tailoring what she does to her forum," Van Nest said. "That's the kind of thing clients appreciate: keeping them out of trouble out of town."

—Anna Oberthur