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Kilpatrick's Silicon Valley Leader On New Menlo Park Office

By **Rachel Rippetoe**

Law360 (April 11, 2022, 3:24 PM EDT) -- Kilpatrick Townsend & Stockton LLP named a new leader of its Silicon Valley office, Joseph Petersen, just in time to move to a new office in the Northern California tech hub.

Joseph Petersen

Petersen, who has a litigation practice focused on copyright and trademark law, took over for Jon Michaelson as managing partner of the firm's Silicon Valley office on March 28. Kilpatrick, an Atlanta-based firm with over 20 offices across the United States and Asia, has long had a presence in Silicon Valley.

Law360 caught up with Petersen to chat about his plans for the office and why he's excited about the new space in Menlo Park. This interview has been edited for length and clarity.

What are your plans for shaking up the Silicon Valley office? How do you envision it will grow?

So, you know, it coincides with the move to new space that we're really excited about in downtown Menlo Park in the Springline Complex. It's a very dynamic area. The way I look at the office is kind of the way movie theaters looked at competition about 10 years ago, when home theaters became so good that people were deciding to stay home and watch movies as opposed to going to the theater. I think offices are the same way, now that people have a choice as to where they work. But by the same token, I really want to draw people to the new space. And so it was really designed for a post-pandemic world, making an attractive option for people to come out and work and collaborate, meet up with their colleagues and invite clients. It's very client-focused, collaboration-focused. You want people to feel like they can work from home or in the office, but by the same token I want to incentivize people to come out and to collaborate, and to do that, you need to offer a welcoming environment. You need to be walkable to lunch options and restaurants and have open collaborative space and all of that. I feel like we've achieved that with our new space. And so to me, I could not be taking over at a more exciting time.

What are some of the features of the new office that you're excited about?

We wanted a lot more open common space. We wanted to be able to entertain clients in our space. We wanted to have more collaboration areas. And so that meant we needed to shrink the size of the individual attorney offices. And so we've done that. And that freed up a lot more space for a very open, very large conference room that spills over to a very large eating area, all open, all facing an outdoor terrace, where we're going to have a pergola and then a reception area.

I think what you want to do is have a very inviting space for your clients. The prime real estate should go to that. And you also need to have a lot of open space, open eating area. And that's what makes people want to come out of their offices and meet their colleagues. And so this office was very much designed with that goal in mind.

Northern California is becoming a tight market for talent. Where are you looking to grow and what's your sales pitch to potential hires?

I guess there's a long story and a short story to that. The short story is we are looking to recruit and grow where it makes sense in terms of practice group and cultural fit. And I would love to see the office grow in size right now. We're 22 attorneys, 54 overall in Silicon Valley, and we've been here since 1960. So Kilpatrick invested in Silicon Valley long ago. In the earlier days when it was very much semiconductor-oriented, the focus of the practice was on patent prosecution.

Now that you have very consumer-facing, large technology companies, we've expanded our offerings. I'm a trademark and copyright litigator and moved out here in 2013, and was really the first full-time partner practicing copyright and trademark in the Silicon Valley office. We had a very established team that has done that for a long time in San Francisco. But the firm thought it was important to kind of have that practice offering right here in Silicon Valley. Likewise, we think there are other practice groups that are a natural fit. We've hired some really dynamic partners in complex commercial litigation and patent litigation. And I see that as a trend that will hopefully continue.

I think litigation is a natural fit, corporate is a natural fit, privacy's a natural fit for Silicon Valley. And I certainly don't want to exclude other areas by neglecting to mention them. But to me, those three areas are all kind of low-hanging fruit for us.

You mentioned being on the ground at an early stage in Silicon Valley. What do you think are the benefits of that as you're trying to recruit?

It's a clear commitment to Silicon Valley. We're not one of these firms that we'll only be here as long as we establish a beachhead — we are firmly committed to Silicon Valley. And that's been evidenced by being here for 60 years at this point. And so I think that gives us credibility in the marketplace, in terms of our commitment to this particular market, which is a very unique one.

How have you seen the legal industry in Silicon Valley change since you arrived in 2013?

I think the competition has gotten only more intense. And so there's a real premium, both on my team and the teams in general at Kilpatrick, to be very client-focused, very responsive, to really partner with our clients and really work with them for the long haul. It's not a transactional relationship — we really want to understand their growth, their priorities, their way of doing business. We want to make sure associates are assigned to the key clients and really get to know the people they're reporting to, tracking those clients in the news, and really kind of having an understanding of the culture. When I started out, from a litigation standpoint, in particular, it was a more transactional focus where you had one case for a client, and then you just kind of moved on to a different client. What we found over the past 20 years is it really helps to get a number of attorneys plugged into a client relationship. So we really know a client on a very detailed level.

What are some things your Silicon Valley clients are worried or excited about looking further into 2022?

There's so many issues in terms of the next level. NFTs [nonfungible tokens] are very much a hot topic. Brand owners in terms of looking at the possibilities for monetizing brands through NFTs, automated software and virtual reality, of course, are becoming very significant. It's essentially looking out and peering around the corner of what lies ahead in the next 10 years. Movement towards the digital world is only going to accelerate in the short term, and that presents a lot of opportunities and a lot of uncertainty.

--Editing by Marygrace Anderson.
