

Litigation Leaders: Sandy Hauser of Dentons Is Looking Forward to a ‘Very Busy Trial Year’ in 2022

Hauser, the head of the Dentons U.S. commercial litigation practice, says the firm has dozens of cases slated for next year including a high profile cybersecurity regulatory prosecution and a life insurance fraud dispute set to go before a Texas jury.

By Ross Todd
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Welcome to another edition of our Litigation Leaders series, featuring the litigation practice leaders of the biggest firms in the country.

Meet **Sandra Hauser**, the head of the U.S. commercial litigation practice at **Dentons US**. Hauser, who is based in New York, also serves on the firm’s global litigation and dispute resolution leadership team. She represents a mix of financial institutions, insurance companies, consumer products and services companies, and health care companies.

Litigation Daily: Tell us a little about yourself — beyond what’s in your law firm bio.

Sandy Hauser: I currently lead Dentons US’s commercial litigation practice and hold a number of other leadership roles in the firm. But I began my legal career advocating for social and economic justice and remain incredibly committed to this cause. As a staff attorney for the National Center for Law and Economic Justice (NCLEJ) for five years, I litigated and advocated for low-income women, families and communities on issues of gender, race and economic justice. I now chair NCLEJ’s board and work on numerous impact litigations with the organization, including cases involving racial justice as well as access to benefits on behalf of disabled and economically vulnerable populations in New York.

Community involvement and progressive advocacy remain a priority for me. I spend hundreds of hours annually working on pro bono cases and developing other pro bono work, on top of being a practice leader and one of the firm’s most productive partners, as I feel it’s so vital to “live out” what is important to me.

I also have been centrally involved in New York Says Thank You Foundation (NYSTY), a 501(c)(3) non-

profit organization started by my husband in the wake of 9/11. NYSTY has sent thousands of volunteers from New York and around the country and world to help communities rebuild and recover from natural and human disasters. Dentons attorneys and staff have volunteered on NYSTY projects in many US states and across the globe, including efforts in New York to rebuild more than 120 homes of first responders that were damaged or destroyed after Superstorm Sandy, and efforts to create Stars of HOPE™ with and for communities affected by tornadoes, hurricanes, wildfires and man-made disasters. Most recently, NYSTY helped health care workers and first responders affected by COVID-19. This work was the subject of a documentary film released at the Tribeca Film Festival in 2011, and is further documented in the 9/11 Memorial and Museum in New York City. A photo I took was made into wallpaper across a wall at the museum, and got a NY Times photo credit as well!

I care deeply about advising, mentoring, and supervising lawyers who are coming up in our firm. I spent more than 12 years on the firm’s associate development committee and continue to devote many hours to professional development and business development of our lawyers.



Sandra Hauser, the head of **Dentons US** commercial litigation practice.

Courtesy photo

One of my proudest recent moments was when one mentee compared my approach to “an orchestra conductor — seamlessly brings out the best in each of us to elevate the whole.”

The best advice I have been given, and have passed along to others is to be your authentic self. Showing transparency, and importantly, vulnerability, will make you a better listener and a better leader. So much of professional success is measured by the external (rankings, awards, titles, seeing your name on matters, etc.) but I was told by an important mentor — and it’s so true — that the most important compass is internal. Know who you are, be who you are, be generous with your time to your team, and keep an open ear and an open, inclusive mind, especially to those who bring different perspectives. And lead collaboratively. That not only earns trust, but is critical to getting satisfaction out of what you do

How big is your litigation department and where are most of your litigators concentrated geographically?

Within Dentons US, our litigation practice has 200 lawyers throughout 20 offices (Atlanta, Boston, Chicago, Dallas, Denver, Honolulu, Houston, Kansas City, Los Angeles, Miami, New York, Oakland, Orange County, Phoenix, San Diego, San Francisco, Short Hills, N.J., St. Louis and Washington, D.C.).

Our strategy has been to build the law firm of the future now with a focus on greater U.S. coverage. This commitment is further realized through the firm’s U.S. growth strategy, branded as Golden Spike. In 2020 and 2021, during the global pandemic, Dentons brought together over 400 of the highest quality lawyers in 20 new U.S. markets, including 150 litigators in Birmingham and Mobile, Alabama; Naples, Florida; Des Moines, Iowa; Evansville and Indianapolis, Indiana; Cincinnati, Ohio; Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; and Lehi, Ogden, Salt Lake City and St. George, Utah.

In what three areas of litigation do you have the deepest bench? (I know it’s hard, but please name just three.)

Class action defense, insurance litigation on the insurer-side, and financial services litigation including securities.

What do you see as hallmarks of your firm’s litigators? What makes you different?

We are tenacious, creative, 360-degree thinkers, who don’t follow a litigation “playbook” but rather align our strategies with our clients’ goals. We work extremely hard, but even more importantly we work smart to truly be responsive and partner with our clients to find the best pathways to success. We find the right levers to yield the best outcome, whether that be solving a problem before it

happens by staying ahead of trends, counseling to a litigation avoidance plan, or, when litigation is warranted or lawsuits and regulatory actions hit, navigating an early exit, a victory at trial, a settlement/negotiated resolution, or a strategic business outcome.

A number of things make Dentons different:

- Breadth and depth of practice, both in the U.S. and globally.
- Collaborative and inclusive approach to lawyering, drawing not only upon other litigators but subject matter “experts” in our regulatory, transactional and counseling practices, as well as our business professionals and staff who make up our teams.
- A focus on “what’s around the corner” — i.e., helping our clients anticipate legal issues, including litigation, to be prepared and navigate challenges.
- Our partnering mindset, as described above.

These are the things — on top of our wins! — that make us stand out.

As head of the firm’s U.S. commercial litigation practice, what are some of your goals or priorities for the year?

My top goal is client-focused: Not just meeting, but exceeding, our clients’ needs and goals in their litigation dockets. I will call that “maintaining and building upon Dentons reputation for high performance, responsiveness and excellence.”

I also have internal goals, including in the area of talent. These include:

Diversity, equity and inclusion. I feel that Dentons is a leader among law firms in these areas but we need to be and to do more

Growing our core practice strengths through the continued development of our internal team as well as strategic recruiting.

Supporting all of our colleagues as we continue to work through the pandemic and an ever-evolving set of expectations and needs. We are committed to maintaining communication, mentoring, and the intangibles of a workplace even if we are not physically in the same place as much as in the past.

How many lateral litigation partners have you hired in the last 12 months? What do you look for in lateral hires?

Over the last twelve months we have hired five laterals and have several additional in pipeline: **Mark Califano** focuses on global investigations, litigation, regulatory law, compliance, privacy and information security, **David Kornblau**, a leading Securities and Exchange Commission and Commodity Futures Trading Commission enforcement

practitioner, **Blake Osborn**, who focuses on litigating complex commercial disputes, **Stephen McAllister**, a nine-time U.S. Supreme Court and appellate advocate, and **Tomasita Scherer**, whose practice focuses on breach of contract claims, alleged business torts and compliance risk management. Additionally, an AUSA in Chicago, Illinois will join our team in late December. We look for excellent lawyers with strategic fit for our growing practice.

What were some of your firm's biggest in-court wins in the past year, and can you cite tactics that exemplify your firm's approach to success?

2021 has been a year of tremendous success for our litigation team.

As of the time of writing, Dentons has achieved more than 38 wins in 14 states, for insurance industry clients on large exposure, precedent-setting matters, emanating from COVID-19. This has included early wins in numerous class actions, as well as in other large exposure individual suits, on behalf of multiple national and global insurance companies, many for whom we serve as national coordinating counsel. We are true industry leaders in this space.

We achieved a trial victory in 2021 for a major insurance client in various disputes and lawsuits against a joint venture partner in a longstanding dispute involving the joint venture operating agreements, request for dissociation of the joint ventures, claims for breach of the ventures' operating and management agreements, and claims for breach of fiduciary duties. Thinking outside the box, we placed our client in a position not only to protect its interests, but also to consider the best options for the future of the joint ventures from a business perspective. The two-week bench trial was suspended in March 2020 due to the COVID-19 shutdown before concluding in person this June. The court found in favor of our client's claims and against all of the joint venture partner's claims, which were purportedly valued in excess of \$89 million.

Other highlights:

The firm secured a groundbreaking temporary restraining order for one of the nation's largest municipally-owned energy utility companies against the Electric Reliability Council of Texas (ERCOT) in an ongoing dispute.

We won dismissal of a consolidated securities class action complaint for a longtime client in the bioelectronic medicine industry. Though the plaintiffs alleged material omissions in the registration statement for the company's

initial public offering, the court's opinion is a sweeping endorsement of that statement. The dismissal follows the team's prior dismissal with prejudice of a state court Securities Act class action.

We secured an important win for the City of Atlanta, defeating class certification in a case involving the very popular Atlanta Beltline, a former railroad corridor that has been converted into a multi-use public trail. The putative class members claimed ownership of the former railroad property that now underlies the Beltline and sought tens of millions of dollars in damages for alleged inverse condemnation and trespass on the property, which could have significantly impacted the trail's ongoing development. The trial court denied class certification, finding the plaintiffs had not satisfied any of the statutory requirements, in large part due to the factually intensive inquiry necessitated by the number of and variations in the deeds and other property-rights agreements between the putative class members and the defendants.

We secured complete dismissal of a defamation suit against Barron's, publisher Dow Jones and veteran financial news reporter Bill Alpert. Following motions and oral argument, the Southern District of New York dismissed all claims brought by a prominent securities lawyer over an online Barron's article.

Working pro bono with Legal Aid Chicago, we secured another important win on appeal for a petitioner seeking relief under the Illinois Domestic Violence Act. Our client sought an order of protection to prevent her abusive spouse from harassing and physically harming her. The trial court denied her petition, finding her allegations of abuse not credible because she was still married to and living with her abuser. An Illinois appellate court reversed the dismissal of our client's petition — holding that the trial court erred by improperly considering that the petitioner was still living in the marital home — and remanded the case for a new hearing.

What does your firm's coming trial docket look like?

We have dozens of cases that are expected to go to trial in the next year. These include a high-profile cybersecurity regulatory prosecution; a life insurance fraud dispute heading to a jury trial in Texas, and scores of other matters heading to trial. Dentons is a firm that doesn't just litigate motions — we take cases through verdict. And with the back up in the courts from COVID-19, 2022 is shaping up to be a very busy trial year.