

With New Partner Bob Ruyak

Bob Ruyak's career highlights include serving as the managing partner of a global law firm, co-founding a preeminent patent litigation boutique, and notching countless victories for clients in the antitrust and patent litigation space. In the summer of 2022, he brought his expertise to Larson and will spearhead the firm's expansion in Washington, D.C. In this Q&A, Bob shares what contributed to his successful career, why he chose to join Larson, and how he's planning to enhance the firm's antitrust and patent litigation practices.

1) Your career so far includes being a partner at two large law firms and co-founding a successful patent litigation boutique. What inspired you to be a trial lawyer and how did your practice develop?

My legal career began in the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia as a law clerk with the Honorable John J. Sirica. I spent my first year working on the second Watergate trial. That experience confirmed my career path—I had to be a trial lawyer. After completing my clerkship and joining a large law firm in Washington, D.C., I focused on antitrust litigation and trials.

Over time, I became more involved in patent litigation. Patent cases were traditionally tried in bench trials, but in the early 90s, they transitioned to parties demanding jury trials. Clients needed jury trial lawyers like me. Because of this, I had the opportunity to try some of the first jury trials in patent cases for big-name clients, including Wang Laboratories and Sun Microsystems. In doing so, I quickly recognized that patent litigation was, at its core, similar to antitrust litigation, because it arises from the competition between our clients and their business rivals.

I served as the managing partner for my first large law firm for years. When I moved on to another firm and no longer had the managing partner responsibilities, I wanted to re-establish a more substantial litigation and trial practice. Large firms, however, present challenges to attorneys passionate about building a trial practice. Eventually, I co-founded a litigation boutique focused on antitrust and patent trials. Without the constraints of being at a large firm, we could handle cases for all types of clients and be selective about the trial work we wanted to do.

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2) What about Larson LLP influenced you to make the move to another boutique?

It became very clear to me during the pandemic that I needed a larger platform with more trained lawyers in litigation and trials. I had the opportunity to try a case in August 2021 with lawyers from Larson. I represented two corporations in a large criminal case and the Larson team represented four additional defendant companies. I got to know everyone on the team very well while working out of Larson's Los Angeles office for several weeks. The quality of the Larson lawyers stood out to me—it was by far one of the best trial teams I've ever worked with.

My co-founder and I built a prominent boutique, so I wanted my next firm to be an effective partnership where I could offer as many new opportunities to their lawyers as they could to me. After working with Larson, I saw the chance to combine my expertise in competition litigation—an area that the firm hadn't yet fully developed—with their unparalleled experience in complex litigation and trials. It made sense to put our respective resources together and expand Larson, both in its practice areas and in the Washington, D.C., market. We worked together for months and it became a reality in June 2022.

3) What is unique about your approach to litigation? Why do clients come to you and the Larson team?

I consider all the practice areas I cover to be related to competition law. This is a unique viewpoint, from my perspective. Every company that is successful is in competition with others—they are constantly trying to meet competition and succeed over their rivals. The main areas of competition law include antitrust, patent, trade secret, copyright, and trademark laws—things that give clients competitive advantages, protect and expand their products and markets, and protect them from anticompetitive behavior.

A patent, specifically, gives a company a limited monopoly and allows them to pursue their innovations and inventions while enhancing their competitive power. Sometimes the overlap between patent and antitrust litigation gives clients a perspective and allows them to address their competitive issues more fully.

This focus on all of the critical areas of competition law enables us at Larson to be true partners with our clients. Not just handling one case for each client, but considering and addressing their business objectives. We focus on their growth strategy; their competitive atmosphere; how to achieve their objectives without engaging in anticompetitive activity; how they can protect their core business, products, and revenue streams through patent protection; and enforcing their rights in these areas when necessary. That's what we intend to offer to all of our clients and a great reason for them to rely on us.

4) What do you consider to be the greatest victory you've achieved for a client?

I represented plaintiffs Jones & Laughlin Steel Corp. and Republic Steel Corp. in antitrust claims against several major northeastern railroad companies alleging group boycotts and price fixing. My clients accused the railroad companies of monopolizing the docks on Lake Erie used for the transshipment of iron ore to steel manufacturing facilities in Ohio and Pennsylvania. The basis of the claim was that the railroads conspired to force the steel companies to transship at substantially higher, non-competitive prices. We obtained a jury verdict and damages in excess of \$600 million. It stopped the railroad companies' anticompetitive practices and enabled the new technology of self-unloading vessels to use independent docks to unload iron ore at a fraction of the monopolized transshipment prices.

In the patent space, I represented Wang Laboratories at trial against Toshiba and NEC. Wang Laboratories had developed the first, very small profile, single and dual in-line memory modules, which substantially reduced the size of computers and created the opportunity and the companies to build mini and desktop computers. Dozens of foreign and domestic companies copied this major innovation and started supplying them in competition with Wang Labs. My team's strategy was to win the case against Toshiba and NEC in Virginia court, which we did, and then pursue 25 other companies before the International Trade Commission (ITC). Based on our prior victory at trial, my team established infringement and a reasonable royalty rate, and negotiated favorable settlements for Wang Labs with the remaining infringers.

I also value and take great pride in pro bono work. 30 years ago, a group of law firm partners in Washington, D.C., started the Archdiocesan Pro Bono Legal Network to handle cases involving social security, veteran rates, Medicare, adoption, bankruptcy, and landlord-tenant law issues for those in need of legal assistance. I was one of the founders and am on the board, and I find that case work very rewarding.

5) How do you see your practice evolving at Larson?

The key advantage of Larson is that the firm has a very strong group of lawyers with extensive experience in both litigation and trial work. They are generalists who can handle any type of case in any court. Because of that, they are very eager to learn and expand the scope of their expertise in all areas of competition law, which is where I bring new value to the firm.

I have been very fortunate in my career to rely upon and gain experience from great lawyers senior to me—real mentors who have helped me along the way. I strongly believe that this transfer of experience is a key element of a successful legal practice, and I enjoy working with the younger lawyers because of that. I don't believe in "sink or swim"—I want lawyers to learn from the expertise of people who have already been there and succeeded. I see great growth and potential in all of the junior and mid-level associates at Larson because the firm follows that ideology. I'm looking forward to further evolving my practice by expanding the patent and antitrust litigation capabilities at Larson, and by helping associates and young partners develop and grow in their practices.

6) What is one thing about you that someone wouldn't learn by looking at your professional bio?

I always wanted to be an architect. I have a tremendous interest in architecture and woodworking, and I have built a woodworking shop where I can be creative. I enjoy building things for my family and our home. I have also built models for trials. As one example, I had a patent case that involved spinal implants and I needed a large-scale model to show the jury how the implants work. I built a model that was 300X the size of a spinal implant to display to the jury. So, my clients could also benefit from my sideline!

Bob Ruyak has served as lead and first-chair trial counsel in dozens of complex, high-stakes cases for four decades. With a focus on protecting and enhancing his clients' competitive interests, he handles a diverse array of antitrust, competition, and patent litigations. Bob also represents both plaintiffs and defendants in class action, insurance recovery, shareholder, and contract disputes, as well as individuals and corporations in civil and criminal investigations and cases.