Chief of the Month: JoAnn Gibbs, Nevada

Each month, the Center for Consumer Protection will provide an article about an Attorney General’s Office Consumer Protection Chief.

It is an honor to be in the company of the consumer chiefs who have previously been featured in this column. I have enjoyed working with and learning from my consumer protection colleagues, many of whom I now also call my friends.

The Nevada Attorney General’s Bureau of Consumer Protection, under the direction of the Consumer Advocate, enforces the Nevada Deceptive Trade Practices Act, antitrust matters under the Nevada Unfair Trade Practices Act, and advocates for consumers in utility rate cases. In addition to the Consumer Advocate, we have a robust team of attorneys and technical, administrative, and legal support staff. Some of our attorneys also do antitrust work. We are divided between two locations – the Consumer Advocate and part of our staff are located in Carson City; the remainder of the staff is in Las Vegas where I am located. While being more than 400 miles apart can be challenging at times, we manage to successfully work together as a statewide team.

The consumer attorneys handle a variety of civil cases involving administrative, local and state matters. We also participate in the Fight Fraud Taskforce and the Technological Crime Advisory Board. In addition we also have a very robust multistate practice and have been involved in many cases of national import, including playing a significant role in the National Mortgage Settlement multistate negotiations and as a member of the Monitoring Committee.

Our attorney general, Adam Paul Laxalt, has been very active in supporting and enhancing our consumer protection efforts in Nevada. Upon taking office in 2015, Attorney General Laxalt took immediate steps to increase consumer protections for our military communities by creating the Office of Military Legal Assistance within the Attorney General’s office. Under this nationally recognized program, more than 400,000 active duty servicemembers and veterans have the opportunity to receive free pro bono legal assistance and representation on a wide variety of civil matters. Attorney General Laxalt also established a new unit within his Bureau of Criminal Justice dedicated to prosecuting financial fraud perpetrated against Nevada consumers and vulnerable populations.
Like my friend Parrell Grossman, I did not begin my career as a lawyer. After graduating from UC Berkeley, I served two years as a Peace Corps volunteer in Bolivia. I later worked in the Latin America Division of the Office of Special Services at the Peace Corp headquarters in Washington DC. We handled any and all volunteer special needs ranging from volunteer marriages, deaths (sadly there were a few), medical evacuations, and host country volunteer program expulsions. After a career detour as real estate broker in Scottsdale, Arizona, I entered law school at Gonzaga University in Spokane, Washington in 1991. In 1994 after graduating, I moved to Las Vegas where I clerked for a Clark County District Court Judge from September of 1994 – June of 1996. I joined the Nevada Attorney General’s Bureau of Consumer Protection in July of 1996, and I am still there - about 22 years and five attorneys general later.

I tell new attorneys how much they will enjoy and benefit from the diverse legal practice opportunities open to consumer attorneys. My practice has included administrative cases, criminal prosecutions of “boiler room” telemarketing operators,litigating a number of civil cases, including a joint federal/state trial with the FTC against a national multilevel marketing company headquartered in Las Vegas, and state civil litigations against deceptive sweepstakes marketers, including Publishers Clearing House.

I was promoted to Senior Deputy in 2001, managing a large staff, which included deputies and investigators in the Las Vegas and Carson City offices involved in civil litigation and criminal prosecutions. In 2005, I became the Bureau’s primary multistate attorney and concentrated on expanding and coordinating the Bureau’s consumer protection multistate practice. I was appointed to my current position as Chief in 2012. In addition to continuing my multistate practice, I am responsible for the administration and oversight of the Home Again Homeowner Relief Program, sponsored by the Attorney General’s Office and funded through proceeds from the National Mortgage Settlement. This program, launched in 2013, provides free housing counseling, consumer and housing legal aid assistance, and education and outreach programs for Nevada citizens statewide.

On a personal note, I enjoy gardening, playing poker with some of my attorney friends, traveling to Italy, and hanging out with my two rescue basset hounds, Lulu and Freddie. Finally, I would be remiss if I did not give a shout out to Abigail Stempson and Blake Bee for their efforts in enhancing communications and support for the state consumer protection attorneys, and for developing and expanding our training opportunities through NAGTRI.