

A Team Player

Buzz Frahn appreciates Vanderbilt Law School for “preparing people to work well together.”

BY GRACE RENSHAW

When Harrison J. (Buzz) Frahn offered to work with Vanderbilt Law School’s admissions department to interview prospective students for the Class of 2012, he knew what he was looking for: team players. “When you get out in the real world and practice at a law firm, you work together in groups representing clients,” he says. “The ability to be civil and get along with people while also being a zealous advocate is a rare ability. Vanderbilt does a good job of preparing people to work well together. Students are competitive, but it’s not zero-sum — they work together in a way that helps everyone win.”

After his graduation from Vanderbilt in 1996, Frahn joined Simpson Thacher & Bartlett as an associate in the firm’s Manhattan offices. Three years later, the firm offered him the opportunity to move to Palo Alto, California, with seven colleagues and open a new office. “I made a two-year commitment,” he says. “That was more than 10 years ago.” The firm’s Silicon Valley office now houses more than 80 attorneys and a thriving practice that encompasses corporate, securities, antitrust and intellectual property law. As a trial lawyer, Frahn has represented industry giants such as Cisco, Intel, NEC, Xilinx, Accenture and Avistar Communications, and he currently represents Elpida Memory in what he describes as one of the largest criminal price-fixing investigations in history. “There’s a huge demand in Silicon Valley for lawyers who not only ‘get’ technology but have the ability to explain it in plain language to judges and juries. Our specialty is trying and winning high-stakes, bet-the-company cases, and that’s exactly what patent cases have evolved into. It’s engag-

ing to be part of our clients’ culture of innovation, and I enjoy the work immensely.”

Even though he has settled in the Bay Area, Frahn remains involved with Vanderbilt, and he was an early and enthusiastic supporter of the interview program launched this year. “The fact that we interview prospective students not only distinguishes Vanderbilt among other top law schools, it lets us sell the school,” he says. “When they meet Vanderbilt law graduates, prospective students experience for themselves the collegial quality they may have read about, and that comes across loud and clear as a major distinguishing factor.” He also serves as Simpson Thacher’s firm representative during Vanderbilt’s annual fund drive. “It’s an easy job to do,” he says, “because I’ve found alumni are always willing to support Vanderbilt because they have fond memories of the school.”

Frahn acknowledges that Vanderbilt’s “rare combination” of academic excellence and collegiality made the school stand out as a good choice for him, although he was also eager to spend time in his hometown of Nashville. “I grew up in Nashville, and my family was still there,” he recalls. “I was planning on working in New York, and spending three years near my family was really attractive.” Another inducement was a scholarship grant. “I feel compelled to support the school because those grants were a big part of why I was able to go to Vanderbilt,” he says. “I owe a debt to the school, and I’d like to make sure that the same doors are opened for others who need it.”



Vanderbilt isn’t the only recipient of Frahn’s time, resources and legal skills. In 2007, he was the Counsel of Record heading a team of Simpson Thacher attorneys and Professor Beth Van Schaack of the Santa Clara University Law School that drafted and filed an amicus brief on behalf of a distinguished group of

International Humanitarian Law Experts that included Vanderbilt Professor Michael Newton. The brief, filed in the cases of *Boumediene v. Bush* and *Al Odah v. United States*, argued in support of Guantánamo Bay detainees’ right to bring habeas petitions in U.S. federal courts. On June 12, 2008, the Supreme Court recognized those rights and struck down Congress’s attempt to strip federal courts of jurisdiction to hear detainees’ habeas petitions as an unconstitutional suspension of the writ of habeas corpus. The landmark ruling cleared the way for detainees to bring habeas petitions challenging the grounds of their continued detention by the U.S. military at a detention center in Guantánamo Bay, Cuba. “Our brief argued that the Geneva Conventions provide prisoners of war with substantive and procedural rights, and that the Court should be mindful of these and other international legal obligations in considering whether to retain jurisdiction over habeas petitions,” Frahn says. “We believed this was an extremely important case with repercussions extending far beyond the right to bring habeas petitions. As advocates, we’re pleased the Court ruled the way we wanted, and perhaps more importantly as citizens, in a way all of us can be proud of.”