

Cleveland attorney relishes diversity of her defense work

By Brian Cox



As a talented, ambitious young lawyer aiming to hone her craft, Taylor Dennen finds she learns something new about the practice of law every day.

“They call it a practice for a reason,” says Dennen, an associate at McNeal, Schick, Archibald & Biro Co., L.P.A. in Cleveland. “You’re doing different things every day. That is what makes it exciting and challenging, and that’s what I really enjoy about it. Even up until you retire, you’re still learning every single day.”

A native of Erie, Pa., Dennen traces her interest in advocacy back to high school. Like a good number of future attorneys, her path began with speech and debate competitions.

“As a high-schooler, I always got a thrill out of arguing,” she says with a laugh.

She enjoyed the research, preparation, analysis, and presentation that debate required. Competitors often had to argue both sides of an issue, forcing them to understand opposing viewpoints while constructing persuasive arguments of their own.



Taylor is a graduate of the University of Akron School of Law. She was surrounded by family at graduation, including (l-r) her brother, Vincent, her uncle, Fred, her nana, and her mother, Janet.

“I just really found a thrill in the research, the summarization, and then presenting the argument,” she says. “And then determining with an objective judge, did I make the case?”

The activity opened doors beyond her hometown. Through debate tournaments, Dennen traveled throughout the country, competing at schools such as Harvard, Yale, and George Mason University. Those experiences broadened her horizons and reinforced her interest in advocacy.

“That was super fun,” she recalls. “We were traveling, I would say, every three weeks or so.”

The experience ultimately proved more compelling than athletics and helped point her toward law school. After earning her undergraduate degree in economics from the University of Pittsburgh, where she served as president of the university’s pre-law fraternity, Dennen enrolled at the University of Akron School of Law.

There, she further developed her litigation skills through civil litigation clerkships and participation on Akron Law’s nationally recognized mock trial team. But like many young attorneys, her real education began after graduation.

Dennen passed the Ohio bar in 2021 and accepted her first attorney position at a plaintiff-side personal injury and nursing home litigation firm. The experience was short-lived, but it proved formative.

Fresh out of law school, she entered practice eager to learn. Instead, she found herself struggling to gain the practical experience she sought. She describes her frustration with being unable to move cases forward because every decision required approval she could not obtain. Opportunities to interact with clients, draft substantive pleadings, and develop litigation judgments were limited.

“I was in this critical moment of my career, and I felt I wasn’t learning what I needed to learn,” she says. “I learned very quickly that I was wasting valuable time there.”

The realization was unsettling. She had just completed law school, survived the bar examination, and secured her first legal job. Yet within months she knew she needed a different environment.

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Taylor with her parents and brother on a tour of Pompeii, with Mt. Vesuvius in the background.

The search for a new opportunity to develop her skills and grow as a lawyer led her to McNeal Schick Archibald & Biro in 2022.

Founded more than 90 years ago, the Cleveland-based firm has built its reputation defending insurance carriers, businesses, and professionals throughout Ohio. The firm's attorneys handle a broad range of litigation matters, including personal injury defense, insurance coverage disputes, construction litigation, commercial litigation, and professional liability matters.

Dennen was most impressed, however, by the firm's culture and its willingness to help young attorneys mature professionally.

During her interviews, firm leaders, including managing partner Brian Winchester, made it clear that they expected young lawyers to learn by doing.

"The only way I can learn is if I'm doing it myself," says Dennen.

When she arrived at the firm, she had little experience in insurance defense litigation. Yet instead of shielding her from challenging assignments, the firm's attorneys entrusted her with meaningful work from the outset.

"Brian was throwing me into hearings," she recalls. "He was having me write these big motions right away."

Winchester encouraged her to ask questions while also reminding her that the firm had hired her because they trusted her to do the work.

"There were times when he would say, 'You're here for a reason. I trust your judgment,'" Dennen says. "I have the senior leadership's experience and guidance to lean on, but I'm still learning myself."

The combination of mentorship and independence remains one of the defining aspects of her experience at the firm.

For Dennen, it also highlights an important lesson for younger attorneys. Many law graduates are drawn to larger firms by prestige, compensation, or high-profile clients. Yet she believes early opportunities to develop judgment and take ownership of cases can be equally valuable.

"By doing it myself is how I'm going to actually learn what I should do in a case and what I shouldn't do in a case," she says.

She believes newer attorneys often underestimate how much growth comes from simply being willing to learn.

"I think there is a common feeling amongst young lawyers today that we may not be good enough," she says of young lawyers. "Inexperience can be a good thing because you can learn the correct and the incorrect ways to do things."

Today, Dennen's insurance defense practice encompasses a wide variety of matters. One of the aspects she enjoys most is the diversity of work.

The practice requires her to handle a broad range of legal issues while balancing the interests of insured clients and insurance carriers. It also involves substantial work outside the courtroom, including investigation, analysis and coverage issues that often unfold long before a lawsuit reaches trial.

While courtroom appearances remain exciting, Dennen has developed an appreciation for the quieter forms of advocacy that occur behind the scenes. She particularly enjoys shepherding cases from inception through resolution. Several matters she inherited early in her career have now reached their conclusions, giving her a sense of accomplishment that comes from seeing years of work pay off.



A lifelong Pittsburgh Steelers fan, Taylor tries to attend at least one game a year with her brother, Vincent.

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“It is fulfilling to see these cases through, raising them from infancy and then bringing them to adulthood,” she says.

More importantly, she values the opportunity to help clients navigate situations that often create significant stress and uncertainty. More than one client has admitted to Dennen that legal issues keep them up at night. Helping clients find reassurance during those moments is among the most rewarding aspects of her work and signals to Dennen that the practice is indeed paying off.

“I’ve gotten a lot of positive feedback from clients who’ve said I helped reassure them that their case would be taken care of,” she says.

Though Dennen and her boyfriend, Tyler, recently bought a house in the Cleveland area, she remains a lifelong Pittsburgh Steelers fan, which can lead to some good-natured friction in an office where she is surrounded by fans of the hometown Cleveland Browns.

Dennen grew up in a hardworking household where effort and responsibility were expected. Her mother worked her way up from an entry-level position to become the general manager for a food distribution company. Her father, a sales engineer, balanced work with many of the responsibilities traditionally associated with caregiving at home.

Together, they instilled a strong work ethic.

“I started working as a teenager,” says Dennen, who earned her own spending money at an ice cream shop and contributed toward her first car. She learned early that opportunities were available, but they required effort.

“I have a tremendous amount of respect for how hard my parents worked and I try to incorporate the strong leadership skills that they instilled into me when I was growing up,” says Dennen.



Taylor and her boyfriend, Tyler, a teacher, enjoy traveling and exploring Ohio.

In 2021, during her final year of law school, Dennen’s father passed away from cancer, only months before she began studying for the bar exam. Looking back, she sees that period as one of extraordinary challenge but also growth.

“A lot of life was happening to me at once,” she says.

The experience deepened her appreciation for family and fortified her resilience.

“If dealt with in a very healthy way, difficult circumstances can mold you for the better and they can mold you to be more empathetic,” she says.

It is a lesson she continues to apply in her own career. Nearly five years into practice, she still views herself as a student of the profession. She remains focused on improving and growing as a lawyer every day as she advances her clients’ best interests.

“I’m here to make my client’s life better when they’re presented with difficult legal circumstances,” says Dennen. “I’m here to do my job to advocate for them, and those experiences can help shape you into a better professional.”