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Houston Litigation Firm Vasquez Waite Off to 'Fast and Furious' Start

FEBRUARY 8, 2024 | **BROOKS IGO**



In the summer of the 2020 pandemic, Houston attorneys Cara Vasquez and Mark Waite got pulled into a “fast and furious” injunction matter that resulted in 10 court appearances over two weeks for “emergency hearings” requested by opposing counsel without much notice or prep time.

“It was a true running down to the courthouse and you better have a suit in your office experience,” Vasquez recounted.

Waite, a 30-year lawyer and former senior in-house attorney at LyondellBasell, described the experience as the “Wild West.”

Shortly after this phase of the litigation, which is still ongoing, Vasquez went on maternity leave after having her first child, a daughter. When she returned from leave at DLA Piper, Vasquez and Waite determined they wanted to do more of this kind of work.

“The pace was faster than what we typically run into in Big Law practice,” she said.

On Jan. 1, Vasquez and Waite took the plunge and launched their own litigation firm, Vasquez Waite. Though one might expect the more senior attorney Waite’s name first, the two attorneys and their spouses agreed to flip a coin for the order of the names.

“The first month in is all of the things,” Vasquez said. “It is so much more than I thought I was going to be doing. We are also way busier in the first month than I thought we would be.”

In the first 31 days, the nascent firm has made two new hires, hosted three client happy hours, brought on four brand new clients, engaged six repeat clients, signed 10 engagement letters and held court for countless late afternoon “strategy sessions.”

Vasquez says she and Waite are “complete opposites” on paper. Waite is a “huge Aggie”; Vasquez graduated from the University of Texas. Waite is a girl dad five times over; Vasquez is the mother of one. Plus, the demographic differences.

But the two developed a chemistry working together and, in many ways, became the “glue” of the Houston office at DLA Piper.

The duo’s bread and butter is litigation related to the petrochemical and construction industries.

In one major ongoing matter, Vasquez and Waite delivered closing arguments last year on behalf of a chemical company in a dispute with the general contractor involving hundreds of millions in claims for delay, productivity, quality issues and charges. Vasquez described it as a “pivotal trial experience” in her career, in part because the trial ended up squarely during her maternity leave.

With the full support of her family, she decided to return from leave to try it. She praised her team, her client and the court for being “extremely accommodating” to new motherhood.

“Although I would never advocate for someone to miss those early moments with their newborn, I would absolutely advocate for everyone to build a base to protect those career-defining moments.”

It’s especially meaningful to Vasquez considering she never dreamed her career evolving the way it has.

The girl from El Campo, Texas, whose dad didn’t finish high school and mom didn’t finish college, thought the Big Law world was a “pipe dream.” She said she was “floored” when she received the call from DLA Piper, one of the largest firms in the world, to join as a first-year and had to conference in her parents.

“My mom started reading to me in the womb and never stopped; my dad taught me that hard work was something we are fortunate to do and do we must. So, I did and did,” Vasquez said in a [LinkedIn post](#).

“Fast forward all of these years later and now I get why they said – dream bigger.”

As for the future of Vasquez Waite, Vasquez said the dream is to grow the firm to at least 10 to 15 attorneys, if not more, and to compete with Big Law for substantial matters but not charge Big Law rates. Just as important, she is aiming to achieve the “glue factor.”

“I want to build something where people really enjoy the culture and community,” she said. “Where people are attracted to the people.”



Brooks Igo

Brooks Igo is the publisher at The Texas Lawbook and covers lateral moves.

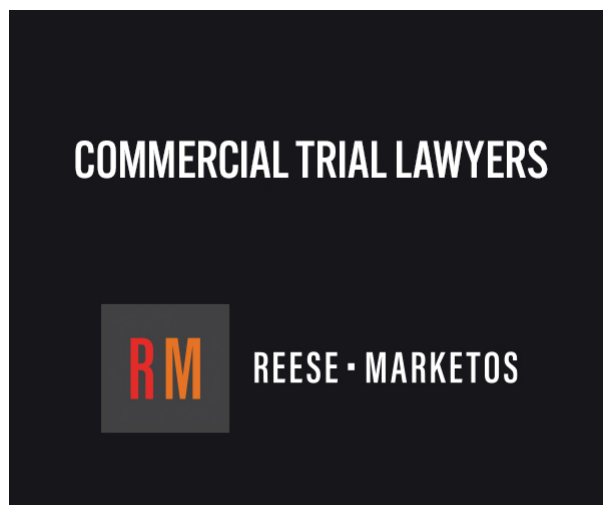
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