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Cantor Colburn Immerses Japanese Lawyer In IP Law Business

By KAREN ALI

Cantor Colburn partner Michael Cantor realized more than a decade ago that the way to bring his intellectual property law firm to the next level was to attract global business to bolster the rapidly growing domestic practice.

But in thinking big, he started small. The firm conquers the world by building personal relationships.

One approach has been to have lawyers from other countries, especially those who work for clients, come spend long periods of time at the Hartford office. For the past year, the firm has hosted Takashi Oki, an in-house counsel with Rohm Semiconductor in Japan. He is living in New Britain and is immersing himself in American culture and U.S. IP law.

"Partnerships like this help build bridges," said Jessica Lister, director of marketing for Cantor Colburn.

Cantor said Japanese companies apply for the second highest number of patents (after United States companies, of course) and he realized he had to build a relationship with Japanese companies. "We began to have foreign attorneys spend long periods of time at our office in the early 2000s, probably around 2002 or 2003. We have had extended stays from clients based in Japan, Korea and France," Cantor said.

"Like so many other aspects in life, creating, maintaining and growing strong win-win business dealings is all about building strong, close personal relationships," Cantor continued. "Bottom line is that there is no better way to create such long lasting relationships than living, working and socializing with a foreign colleague over an extended time period."

Cantor said that it's important for attorneys from other countries, especially those who work for big companies, to understand U.S. patent law, so these extended visits pay off for them as well. "It's important [for IP attorneys] in all these countries, especially



Takashi Oki

Japan, that they understand U.S. patent law, U.S. culture, and English because they want them to efficiently work with their counterparts in the United States," Cantor said.

Oki will be in a good position when he returns to Japan when his one-year stint is up, Cantor said. "The ones that come here are the ones who are on the fast track," Cantor said.

Mentoring A Client

Oki is still learning English so the interview with the Law Tribune conducted was with the help of a paralegal, Shigemi Garbo. At times, she translated Oki's answers into English. Other times, he was able to answer for himself, in English.

This isn't Oki's first time in the United States. But it's his first time working and living here. He visited previously on a business trip to New York City and California, he said.

Originally, he had been working in engineering at Rohm Semiconductor, an electronic parts supplier based in Kyoto. But he was reassigned to intellectual property law, and is now in charge of IP law at the company. A significant amount of the company's legal affairs involve U.S. companies and courts, he said, so it's important to soak up as much information about American IP law as possible.

Oki's duties at Cantor Colburn are simple. He works with the firm's attorneys on patent applications for his own company. And so it's

an interesting relationship -- part teacher and mentor, part law firm and client.

"Because he's our client, it's a real partnership," said Lister. "Cantor Colburn's motivation is to serve our client, Rohm, by not only assisting with their patents but also by furthering Mr. Oki's understanding of U.S. patent law. We want to help them with their business needs, that's what makes a true partnership. We also serve clients better if we understand why their culture is different from ours. It's all about service, responsiveness and partnerships."

Oki has definitely been exposed to U.S. culture while he has been here. He has attended University of Connecticut football games, Boston Celtics basketball games and visited Mohegan Sun Casino. "He thinks in Connecticut they are kinder than in other cities," said Garbo, translating for Oki.

Like so many other aspects in life, creating, maintaining and growing strong win-win business dealings is all about building strong, close personal relationships.

Oki, who will be leaving this summer, after a one-year stay, lives near the Westfarms Mall in New Britain. His wife enjoys shopping and the couple likes taking walks in nature. "They are always together," Garbo said.

Oki said he has picked up English on the fly, mostly from his colleagues at work. His wife, who is unable to work due to immigration laws, takes ESL classes twice a week.

Cantor Colburn lawyer Dan Lent, who mentors Oki, said that it's important that American firms dealing with Japanese companies understand the nuances of Japanese culture. Oki has helped educate Cantor Colburn's lawyers in that area. And so for lawyers on both sides of the ocean, the relationship "is beneficial for both."