Rising Star: BakerHostetler’s Seanna R. Brown

By Matt Chiappardi

Law360, Wilmington (April 18, 2016, 10:45 PM ET) -- BakerHostetler partner Seanna R. Brown has cemented herself as a key member of the team representing the liquidation trustee for Bernie Madoff’s collapsed investment firm, helping to amass more than $10 billion for victims of the convicted Ponzi schemer and meriting a spot as one of seven securities attorneys among Law360’s 2016 Rising Stars.

Brown, 36, had been working on the Madoff case since the very beginning when Irving H. Picard was appointed the trustee in 2008, when she was just a third-year associate, who with what seemed like an unassuming email from her colleagues to simply attend a meeting was thrust right in the middle of the fallout from what is believed to be the largest Ponzi fraud in U.S. history.

“It was the most low-key email ever,” Brown told Law360. “Little did I know that was the beginning of a whole new chapter in my professional life.”

By 2015, Brown, now a partner at BakerHostetler, was at the forefront of the kaleidoscope of litigation surrounding the liquidation, and using her securities law expertise to help recover roughly $10.7 billion for victims and distribute more than $7.5 billion to Madoff’s defrauded customers.

Madoff pled guilty to federal felony charges connected to the scheme. He was sentenced to 150 years in prison, and his firm, Bernard L. Madoff Investment Securities LLC, was placed in Chapter 11.

From 2009, Brown litigated from stem to stern a complex but crucial argument over the calculation of net equity for claimants and whether they were entitled to interest on their claims against the estate.

The issue made it all the way to the Second Circuit, which sided with Brown’s position, a victory that was both satisfying and more than little nerve-wracking for the young attorney making her first ever argument before the appellate panel.

“It was a billion-dollar appeal to lose,” Brown said. “No pressure for my first argument before the Second Circuit, right?”
Brown has also been front-and-center with the myriad nooks and crannies of the case, leveraging what had become second-to-none institutional knowledge of the proceedings garnered from being there on day one.

“I was doing everything from securing the premises to things like processing payroll,” Brown said. “Simultaneous with that, I was helping to forge much of the legal work. That first year, we received more than 16,000 claims.”

In her late 20s when the case started, Brown found herself staring down accomplished attorneys that had decades on her in terms of experience.

But she found footing not only through her knowledge of and substantial work on the case but also through the support of her colleagues, specifically veteran BakerHostetler trial lawyer and chief counsel for the trustee David J. Sheehan.

“I found a lot of support from him in particular. Both he and the trustee are very supportive of the younger lawyers and give them a platform to establish themselves” Brown said. “The positions I’ve taken, the arguments I’ve made, and the successes we’ve had have helped established my credibility and professional worth.”

Brown earned her undergraduate degree from City University of New York-Hunter College and her law degree at Fordham University School of Law and has been with BakerHostetler since July 2008.

Brown says she takes a measured approach to her practice and prides herself in a calm demeanor that allows her to bring results even under the intense pressure of high-profile cases.

“You need to be likable, even to your adversaries,” she said. “Some young lawyers feel it’s about being tough, not realizing there’s some worth in being more flexible and willing to see where things go.”

--Editing by Brian Baresch.