

KATE G. WESTAD

LOMMEN ABDO COLE KING & STAGEBERG

It's difficult enough to prevail against a tavern in a typical dram shop liability case, but the lawsuit brought by the family of Billy Walsh against Nye's Polonaise Room posed special challenges.

Unlike most dram shop actions, the Nye's case didn't involve a drunk-driving death or injury. Walsh was a bouncer who was shot and killed by an intoxicated patron. The patron later pleaded guilty to second-degree intentional murder. Because Walsh's death was the result of a third party's criminal act, the suit presented all sorts of thorny issues of causation.

To Kate Westad, a plaintiffs' attorney at Lommen Abdo Cole King & Stageberg, the case represented a fascinating challenge that gained poignancy as she bonded with her clients, the Walsh family. She meticulously prepared the case for trial, finding and deposing witnesses, building a strong case top to bottom. Working with a supervising partner, Westad did about 90 percent of the work on the case. Ultimately Nye's agreed to settle for an undisclosed sum, bringing the Walsh family a degree of closure.

Westad, who concentrates mostly in personal injury cases and other plaintiffs' side civil litigation, enjoys taking on tough cases. "I love cases with lots of depositions, with lots of complicated fact patterns," she says. "I love multitasking."

Westad is active in Minnesota Women Lawyers, serving as co-chair of the group's

Professional Development Committee. She has helped to revitalize once-lagging interest in the committee, which now is very vibrant. In addition to her efforts with MWL, Westad has also done pro bono advocacy work for women in custody disputes.

One of Westad's recent pet projects has been establishing a women's personal-injury website, www.womeninjurylawyers.com. The site has multiple purposes, including serving as a marketing tool for her firm and as a place where injured women can go to find legal information and resources specific to them. The site periodically runs public service campaigns, such as a recent one on the dangers of distracted driving, including driving while texting and driving while e-mailing.

Westad is active in the Minnesota Association for Justice, where she was co-chair of the New Lawyers Section for three years, and the Hennepin County Bar Association, where she is a team leader of a mentoring group.

Westad also actively participates in events at her firm, including serving on its 5K team in the Twin Cities Marathon and on its winning corporate fundraising team in a stair-climbing challenge to benefit the fight against lung cancer.

— Mark A. Cohen

